LEARNING MADE EASY

Portable Edition

Decluttering

for dummies®

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Build a strategy for every room

Create your own decluttering mindset

Establish routines for minimalism

Jane Stoller

Decluttering

Portable Edition

by Jane Stoller

for dummies®
A Wiley Brand

Decluttering For Dummies®, Portable Edition

Published by:
John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030-5774
www.wiley.com

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Published simultaneously in Canada

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2020953026

ISBN 978-1-119-81027-8 (pbk); ISBN 978-1-119-81028-5 (ebk)

Manufactured in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Introduction

I am passionate about helping people reach their goals and create the lives they dream of. I know that decluttering your entire life will help you achieve what you desire. I also know that decluttering is more than simply clearing your physical clutter, although this will definitely help you feel less stressed and more productive. Decluttering requires a complete shift in mindset to ensure that your entire life is in alignment with your goals.

My goal is to get you excited to start decluttering and continue decluttering. Your decluttering strategies will change as your life changes, and they are meant to be adapted. I want to motivate you by explaining the benefits of decluttering followed by practical tips on how to get started and stay decluttered. Often the hardest part is getting motivated to begin. I hope this book is the motivation you need to get started right now and change your life for the better.

About This Book

I have organized this book so you can quickly reference the areas where you need decluttering help immediately. You can also read the entire book cover to cover to get decluttering motivation, discover more about the benefits of living clutter free, or figure out where to start.

Most of this book focuses on decluttering physical spaces in your home, from closets to kitchens to garages. For these chapters, you can use the sections that pertain to you. Read the entire chapters, or use them as a reference. Sometimes I also discuss categories that could be in a different spot in your home. For example, when decluttering the bedroom you may also need to refer to the closet chapter and storage for books if you have lots of these items in your bedroom.

I also include a chapter about decluttering the never-ending flow of papers that seem to pile up everywhere. Creating a system for dealing with stuff is the secret to staying clutter free, and I give you some ideas for staying organized in Chapter 12.

Foolish Assumptions

As I was writing this book, I made some assumptions about who would be reading it. This book is for you if

- You want more time and freedom in your life.
- You want to be able to walk through your home and know where everything is without being frustrated looking for things.
- You want a streamlined closet where you waste no time choosing clothes or searching for anything.
- You want everything in your home to add value to your life, not just collect dust.
- You want to be as efficient as possible in your home.
- You want to give back to your community where you can.
- You want simple ideas to help you feel free of clutter in all areas of your life.

Icons Used in This Book

Throughout the book, I use a handful of icons to point out various types of information and highlight certain points. Here's what they are and what they mean:

The Author Says icon is where perhaps I present lots of information beforehand, but I want to put my own spin on it. This is also where I bring up anything that is relevant to my technique or what I consider my signature advice.

The Remember icon is like a little Post-it note, labeling anything in the book that's key to remember.

The Tip icon indicates a quick way to remember important material or perform a task. Use these tips to help you save time and frustration.

WARNING

The Warning icon helps you steer around common mistakes. It also gives you a heads-up when a task may be extra challenging or there may be some sensitivity around it.

Where to Go from Here

If you know where you want to begin on your decluttering quest, turn to the table of contents or index to find the pages that address that area of your home. Then get busy!

If you're not quite sure about decluttering yet, Chapter 1 gives a brief overview of the concepts and topics covered in the book. Plus, it will likely get you the most excited to start and give you ideas regarding which of the following chapters you want to read next.

When you're ready to tackle a specific area of your home, check out Chapters 3-10; these chapters include most areas in most homes. If you can't find a specific area or category, don't worry because many of the tips and processes for decluttering can be adapted easily from a garage to a linen closet to the bathroom. You will find that there is repetitive advice because the same strategies do apply, and if it gets too repetitive and you're well versed in the processes, you can skip to another section. After you implement a few decluttering strategies, you will notice that you now have more time and are automatically using these techniques.

This last piece of advice should be easy to follow: Don't read what you don't need. If you don't have a garage, then you likely won't need to read about garage decluttering. However, since the strategies and principles apply to many spaces, I would read the most relevant chapter for your current needs. Maybe one day you will have a garage, and then you can read that chapter!

My goal is that you will have less stress and more happiness when you have less stuff and know where it all is.

Happy decluttering!

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Looking at decluttering styles
- Seeing the psychology of decluttering
- Deciding what to let go of

Chapter 1
The Basics of Decluttering

The goal of this book isn't to simply inspire you to declutter one or more of your spaces or show you how to go about it. The goal of decluttering is to be able to live your life the way you want to live it by determining your goals, figuring out where there are blockages, and figuring out what's holding you back from achieving what you desire. Then you clear the clutter to help you create the life you deserve.

This book helps you identify which items in your home are truly clutter and what is taking up mental space unnecessarily, which is often overlooked. When you're always hunting for your keys that you lost (again) or searching for your favorite blouse, you become stressed and distracted, which keeps you from making progress toward your goals. Clutter can be difficult to identify, which is likely why you picked up this book in the first place. Clutter can range from obvious trash to very expensive, large things.

To make the issue even more complicated, clutter is different for every person. One person's clutter is another person's joy. Thus, decluttering needs to be an individual quest. Each person will have a different approach to decluttering depending on their lifestyle, and this book will help you determine a method that works for you. The first step is to determine your personal cluttering style.

Determining Your Current Cluttering Style

Decluttering doesn't mean you only need to keep one item of clothing or furniture, or that you have to commit to a minimalist lifestyle.

Some of us can easily declutter and get rid of everything we don't need immediately without giving it a second thought. But for most of us, decluttering is not that easy and goes much deeper into our emotional need for stuff due to our consumerist society. According to the *Huffington Post,* there are more storage facilities than McDonald's restaurants in America. At the end of 2014, there were 48,500 self-storage facilities in America compared to 14,350 McDonald's (at the end of 2020, those numbers were about 48,000 self-storage facilities and 13,800 McDonald's). This further proves that getting rid of items is so difficult for us that we'd rather pay to store them!

People who have excessive clutter stashes can also become hoarders, and approximately 19 million Americans fall into this category. The American Psychiatric Association defines hoarders as people who "excessively save items that others may view as worthless. They have persistent difficulty parting with possessions, leading to clutter that disrupts their ability to use their living or work spaces."

I'm not saying that hoarding, which is considered a disease similar to OCD, is anything remotely close to being a clutterbug. I am using the term clutterbug to describe someone who lets clutter build up over time and hangs onto items for reasons that are more emotional than practical. However, holding onto clutter could eventually lead to hoarding, which is why you should take decluttering seriously and commit to it regularly. Whether you are detail-oriented or a big-picture thinker, you should know your clutter style like you know your blood type to gain a better understanding of yourself and how you can maximize your life.

Answer these questions honestly to start thinking about your clutter style:

1. Do you constantly hunt for things you've misplaced in your home?
2. Do you put things into stacks or piles?

3. When you look at your flat surfaces, such as your desk or kitchen counters, are their piles of things on them?
4. Do you end up buying a second or third item for use in your home because you can't find the one you already own?
5. Do you use shopping as retail therapy rather than shopping only when you really need something?
6. Do you not have room to put away some of the stuff you own?
7. Are there clothes lying on the floor?
8. When you reach for a pen, do you have 50 to choose from but sometimes end up with one that doesn't work?
9. Do you keep every single Christmas card you've been given?
10. Do you keep every plastic food container you accumulate but find that matching lids are missing when you need them?
11. Does your home make you feel stressed out because of all the stuff in there?

If you answered more than half the questions with a yes, you are most likely a clutterbug or on your way there. If you are feeling overwhelmed by clutter right now and you answered yes to several of the preceding questions, you may have some habits that are causing you to head down a self-sabotaging path. Houses with too much stuff in them can be physically, emotionally, and spiritually draining, and that takes away your peace of mind and joy of heart. Don't worry; there's always room for improvement. The first step is recognizing that a problem exists in order to take steps to create your best, decluttered life.

REMEMBER

Don't get discouraged or angry with yourself for your clutter habits — life can be busy and hectic. Setting up a decluttering mindset takes work and dedication. You're not alone.

The next step is to tackle the mental and emotional aspects of being a clutterbug so you can begin to create and maintain new habits that will help you experience clutter-free joy.

There are several different types of so-called clutterbugs. You may fall into one category, all categories, or none of them, and that's okay. I added the clutterbug types in hopes that you may see yourself in the different categories and begin to envision a plan of how you can overcome your own barriers to decluttering. These visions will help move you forward on your quest to declutter.

WARNING

Whatever your clutter personality, many people say, "I will deal with this tomorrow, next week, next month, next year," and we see how this pattern can escalate. No matter what type of clutterbug your personality reveals, you cannot put off decluttering any longer. If you defer this task, it only gets bigger, making you even less likely to deal with it. From paper to tech gadgets to piles of clothing, the task will only get bigger daily. I often also say that people who defer this task are also the ones who end up being the most stressed about clutter.

The emotional clutterbug

The *emotional clutterbug* is the most common type and is characterized by emotional attachment to items that have sentimental value. The emotional clutterbug prioritizes feelings over practicality. It's difficult for this clutterbug to get rid of things, and she often purchases items to fill a void or out of pure boredom.

This clutterbug may also be someone who saves sentimental items due to the powerful emotions they evoke. Most people have sentimental items, and that's okay! They bring joy and serve as reminders of happy memories. You don't need to get rid of all your sentimental items; however, you have to set a limit. If you don't have a limit on sentimental items, it's easy for the amount to get out of control, causing clutter in your mental and physical space.

Here are a few strategies to help get you started dealing with sentimental items:

- **Commit to regularly evaluating your sentimental items.** If you own a box of concert shirts that are tucked away but you never look at them, why keep them? After committing to regularly evaluate your sentimental items, you may be ready to part with them.
- **Repurpose sentimental items.** For example, you can frame your favorite concert shirts to make them visible all the time, and then you can discard the rest. Doing so can bring you more joy and less clutter. Plus, having your favorite items on display can help bring more positivity into your life.
- **Keep only a small dedicated space for sentimental items.** Have a space in your home that is precious real estate and dedicate this space to your sentimental items. This will help you be more conscious of what resides there.

» **Envision the joy of being able to actually enjoy the true sentimental items you do keep.** When you surround yourself with items that bring you joy and positivity, they are no longer clutter. Ensure that you can make use of every item and get rid of the rest. Trust me, you'll feel so much lighter once you know that every item you own has a purpose — even if that purpose is simply to bring you happiness!

I discuss emotional attachment to stuff in most chapters of this book, so you can get ideas on how to handle sentimental items associated with the chapters in which they're addressed. What's important is that you set limits because you want to be able to enjoy your sentimental items, and finding them quickly is key for that. Keep them in a labeled box (see Figure 1-1) or on display so they can be viewed, not stored away in an attic where you will forget about them.

Image courtesy of author (photo credit: @avalonmohns)

FIGURE 1-1: An example of a sentimental storage box.

The just-in-case clutterbug

Just-in-case clutterbugs keep things they may need "someday" or to ensure they have them "just in case." This clutterbug is the type of person who keeps the box a microwave came in just in case he has to return it in ten years. Whether the item is a blouse, a kitchen utensil, or an extra lawn mower, this clutterbug operates from a scarcity mindset and a lack of trust or awareness around items he already has.

I know many of us fall into this category, and I definitely do. I used to save every button from every skirt, jacket, and blouse just in case I needed it, when in reality I had a button jar so big it mimicked an old-school cookie jar. Plus, I take everything that needs work done to the tailor, and tailors have buttons. This example may seem trivial; you may think, "How can buttons become stressful clutter?" The truth is that clutter is not restricted to size, value, or even whether it's tangible. Clutter is defined by anything you own in excess that is no longer practical. Keep this in mind throughout the book and remember not to get discouraged — my goal is to make you excited to declutter. The benefits of decluttering outweigh putting it off any longer.

The "I'm not a clutterbug" clutterbug

We've all been in denial at some point of our lives, and the *"I'm not a clutterbug" clutterbug* is familiar with this feeling. This person may be stressed and overwhelmed but has difficulty determining the cause, even though on some level she knows she has too much stuff. This causes the clutterbug to accumulate even more clutter because she isn't even conscious of her actions. Many people who aren't aware that they're a clutterbug carry subconscious stress and don't know where their anxiety is stemming from. I've seen many people become less stressed and anxious after they admit that they own too much because they can then create actionable steps toward a decluttered and happier life.

Maybe you secretly know you're a clutterbug but don't want to admit it because you are a perfectionist, and you plan to spend the entire next month organizing and decluttering perfectly. Perfectionists can be perfect at some types of jobs and tasks, but they usually have an all-or-nothing philosophy. If you're one of them, be careful — you may never be able to get started because the task

is so overwhelming. You don't need to be 100 percent decluttered instantly, and I know for a perfectionist that may be hard to hear. Take the pressure off and start small. Remember that progress is better than perfection.

The "I'll do it later" clutterbug

Along the same lines as denial, the *"I'll do it later" clutterbug* procrastinates decluttering. It's easy to do because often we don't equate decluttering to being fun. I find this clutterbug to be one of the most common types. Luckily, the techniques in this book can not only motivate you to get started but also show you practical solutions on how to go about it.

Constantly putting off decluttering results in the clutter becoming too overwhelming to deal with, and that's why you probably haven't started or just say, "I'll do it later."

Let's face it: We are all very busy and only have a certain amount of time and energy to spend each day. Starting the decluttering process can be emotionally challenging, which makes it even harder to find the time to start. I recommend choosing to spend just 10 to 15 minutes per day decluttering, as this will bring you one step closer to getting things done. Remember that freeing up clutter frees up more time in the long run because you'll no longer waste time taking care of things that you don't use or looking for things that are buried among clutter.

The "I can't decide" clutterbug

Here's a fun fact: We are actually wired to acquire clutter, which makes it even harder to decide what is clutter and what isn't! Our instincts say we should store resources for times of scarcity. Have you ever watched a squirrel gather food for winter? This is exactly that mindset, and they're so focused on it that they don't even think about deciding what to keep. Couple this instinct with our insatiable need to consume and buy new things — because shopping splurges produce dopamine, giving us a happy rush — and it's even more difficult to decide what to declutter. You may often feel sad, stressed, or overwhelmed thinking about what to declutter, and it may feel easier to not decide altogether. However, the inability to decide can cause greater stress in the long run, and it's always best to get out of this mindset and create a plan.

The decision about what to toss can be stressful, and that's why it's a good idea to give yourself timelines and tricks to help minimize the painful decision process. For example, if you really can't decide on which frilly shirts to donate, turn the hangers the opposite way. If after a season you haven't worn them, make a commitment to get rid of these items. Or perhaps you don't have room for the books you have read but you want to remember them. You can take a photo instead and discard the physical book. Ideas like these can help make tough decisions that you may not make otherwise less stressful. There is always room for compromise and adaptability when it comes to decluttering, and it may take some trial and error to figure out what works for you.

The "techie" clutterbug

Techie clutterbugs have so many cables, cords, and tech gadgets they don't even know where to start decluttering, what works, or what goes with each device. This is not an uncommon type of clutterbug, and with today's fast-moving technological changes, it's easy to fall into this category. I am a victim of keeping my old phones just in case, even though they are so old they probably wouldn't even turn on. I also keep wires for that DSL modem plug-in just in case the Wi-Fi goes down, and that frayed charger just in case I lose the new one. We are so intimately connected to our tech gadgets that we naturally keep their accessories because we can't imagine not being able to operate without them.

Think of tech gadgets as the worst type of clutter to hold onto because with the speed of advancements, tech gadgets become useless faster than most other physical stuff. Plus, tech gadgets are more widely available, and new versions are always ready for sale. Just as with all types of clutter, there is no need to hold onto what is no longer practical. Pay attention to what you no longer use and have the courage to part with these items to create more physical and mental space in your life. After you've sorted the gadgets you don't need any more from those you do use, organize the keepers in an easily accessible fashion.

The knowledge clutterbug

Today, limitless knowledge resources are at your fingertips, and what you keep for your knowledge database should be a decision you make based on practical and future reasons. For example, if you purchase the newest edition of a textbook, the previous version should be recycled. Start small if you fall into this category.

AUTHOR SAYS

Knowledge is clutter until and unless it is properly organized in a way that makes that knowledge accessible. My parents have every single *National Geographic* dating back to 1969. After I had a surgery with two weeks' downtime, I took the time to organize every single one by year and put them into slipcovers. The joy that this brought my parents was unbelievable — their memories of reading them, the knowledge they brought them, and the beautiful pictures that are still astounding today. These magazines are filled with knowledge you could find today on the Internet; however, their sentimental value made them extra special. Now that the issues are properly organized, my parents often read editions from past years.

If you have stacks and stacks of reports or papers and have no clue where a specific one is, that's clutter. If they are organized so you can reference them, they can be useful and are no longer clutter. To put it simply, get rid of anything you don't use, or declutter properly so the items are usable.

WARNING

Important digital, mental, or printed knowledge needs to be dealt with properly. Sensitive information should be destroyed or shredded. Perhaps some knowledge needs to be passed on to the next generation or teams. Important documents should be housed in several locations to avoid losing them. Before getting rid of any knowledge, make sure you evaluate it first and determine appropriate steps. For example, I always back up my digital items as well as store them in a digital cloud.

The collector clutterbug

I'm pretty sure all of us have collected something sometime in our lives, from stamps to dolls to watches to baseball cards. Anything that can be collected and cherished can also lead to clutter. Remember the days when you used to collect CDs? Well, now most people don't even have CD players. For those folks, CDs are no longer usable and are therefore considered clutter.

TIP

The key is to really understand whether you're a collector, hoarder, or clutterbug. Hoarders are not able to let go, and this is a serious issue that is repeatedly brought up in this book. Collectors take pride in what they have collected, whether it is worth something or not. The collection becomes clutter when it becomes bothersome and inconvenient to manage. It turns from collection to clutter when embarrassment, shame, or secrecy surround keeping the collection. Clutter is the result of accumulating items

that you don't have the time and energy to deal with. Knowing how and when your collections reach this point is an important but difficult task and should always be monitored by you and your friends or family to help with the process.

The "I can use it someday" clutterbug

My grandma was the perfect example of an *"I can use it someday" clutterbug*, which speaks to how society has shifted and how the era you grew up in makes a big difference. My grandmother lived through the Depression and still had that scarcity mindset of rationing. She did not grow up in today's consumerist society with the ability to have one-day shipping. So her affinity for her stuff was different and almost natural. That said, the era you live does not dictate how much of a clutterbug you become. The "I can use it someday" clutterbug of any age or generation can think like this.

I believe this type of clutter is a real problem because it can lead to hoarding. All the clutterbug types can become hoarders, but this one seems the most likely to. Hoarding can be rooted in deep-seated insecurities, whether financial or emotional. Deep down, hoarders feel like they will never have enough resources, and they fear letting go of anything because they believe that they truly will use that item one day. Even if items are useless, worn, or broken, this type of clutterbug hangs onto any and all items.

TIP

Depending on how severe your "I can use it someday" tendency is, a good start is to mentally reassure yourself that you will be able to find this item again if and when you need it. You can either buy, borrow, or repurpose the item. You have to give yourself the security that more egg cartons will be produced, more Old Navy black sweaters will be knit, and more magazines will be printed. Resources are and will continue to be available.

Understanding the Psychology behind Clutter

I don't have a psychology degree, but I've done enough research on this topic to inspire others to get motivated. You get peace and satisfaction from being in a decluttered space, both physically and mentally. You can also empathize with the idea of feeling

defeated and overwhelmed by the amount of clutter that exists. When clutter exists, your energy is affected physically, mentally, and emotionally.

Clutter always reveals your mindset. If you operate with low self-esteem, you may own more expensive clothing than necessary because you use retail therapy as a means to feel happy. If you are worried about money, you may keep items that you don't necessarily need. If you've dealt with loss and grief, you may be more attached to sentimental items than someone who has not gone through similar experiences. The bottom line is that clutter is a symptom of deeper things going on in your psyche, and when you deal with clutter, you can transform into the person you are meant to be.

REMEMBER

Go back to a time when you were surrounded by clutter and think about how it made you feel. It could be a cluttered desk, a stuffed attic, or your mind full of so many tasks you didn't know where to start. You don't need a psychology degree to understand that when you think back to these times you get a bit stressed — or in medical terms, your cortisol levels rise.

The negative effects of clutter

Here is where I can get really real on the psychological effects of clutter. The biggest effects are stress and increased cortisol levels. A study done by UCLA observed 32 middle-class LA families and found that all of the moms' stress hormones spiked during the time they spent dealing with their belongings.

Clutter can harm relationships, and studies have shown that where the word "clutter" is used to describe couples' current households, a higher percentage of divorces ensue. Clutter can often be the root of disagreements that can lead to larger problems. Whatever you're living situation is — whether you're living with a roommate, significant other, family, stranger, or dog — those you live with define clutter differently, and that, of course, affects your living situation and your daily moods. Here are some tips:

- **Listen to your partner's feelings about the clutter each of you leaves in the house.** Make sure you share decluttering habits with your partner. Share your reasons for wanting to declutter and your strategies. For example, you might show your partner the new boxes you labeled "Donate,"

"Recycle," "Trash," "Sentimental," and so on. Remember, your partner may get worried upon hearing that you're decluttering and fear that you are going to get rid of everything. Be willing to listen to your partner's concerns, voice your reasons for wanting to declutter, and ask for support throughout the process. You can even shed light on the negative effects of clutter to help your partner understand how getting rid of excess stuff can and will improve both of your lives.

- **Get rid of what you don't need to improve your emotional well-being.** I bet you're thinking that today's consumerist society and keeping up with the Joneses mean that we have to have a lot of stuff and keep buying more stuff to put in our bigger houses and so forth. However, if you see your stuff spreading to a level that you can't organize or keep clean, this can cause stress, especially if you take pride in having a tidy home. Therefore, having a cluttered environment can result in feelings of low self-worth and even depression in some cases!
- **Improve your focus.** Clutter is and always will be distracting. This is not rocket science or anything new. Clutter can compete for your brain's focus, and thereby not allow you to give your full focus to what is important. It takes more energy to actively avoid and ignore clutter than it does to actually deal with it.
- **Change your behavior.** A large part of your energy can be attributed to your surroundings. Waking up to an efficient home with things you use daily versus waking up to a big pile of junk makes a difference. This can also influence the behavior of your kids, friends, and even fur babies. Clutter can cause a chaotic environment not only for you but also for those who come in contact with you. For example, entering a doctor's waiting room that's so busy you can barely sit and fill out forms affects your mood differently than entering a sterile, clutter-free environment. Never discount the powerful effect of clutter on your mental and emotional well-being.

Why decluttering lets you do more and stress less

Research has proved the positive effects of decluttering and being organized. However, in a fast-paced life, it's impossible to avoid

all stress. You're stimulated by stuff and people all wanting your attention. While avoiding all stress may not be a real option, how you deal with your stuff can help manage one aspect of your stress. The more stuff you have, both physical and mental, the more your stress is triggered.

Therefore, if you want to feel less stress, decluttering your life is a good start so you can focus more on the other areas of your life. The process can even be therapeutic once you start eliminating other stresses!

Here are a few strategies to help relieve decluttering stress:

- **Stop making impulse buys.** This only leads to more stuff.
- **Clean and tidy up your bedroom.** Where you wake up has a big impact on how your day is affected.
- **Go through your closet.** You don't want to be stressed wondering what to wear or waste time in your closet.
- **Clean out your car.** It's amazing how great a clean car can feel during an otherwise stressful drive.
- **Remove unwanted apps on your phone.** If you're like most people, you phone is with you all day every day and you spend hours staring at the screen. Delete what you don't need.
- **Unsubscribe to emails.** The less spam mail you get, the less stress you feel. Unsubscribe to what you don't need.

TIP

I juggle many things in my life, and I know you do as well. From personal and business obligations to family and friendships, the time struggle is real with ever-increasing obligations. How you juggle so many things can heavily depend on the clutter you have lingering in your home, workspace, and mind. To really reduce stress and be more focused and productive, start relating clutter to stress and slowly reduce it. Tackle one day or category at a time and be consistent.

If You Don't Use It, Toss It

You've probably heard it said before: "If you don't use it, toss it." This is easy to say. However, I want to give you some quick tips on how to implement this advice. It requires a mindset change. You

need to program your mind to say no a lot more. I don't mean to party invites or customer inquiries; I mean to stuff.

Say no when you want to buy something simply because it's your favorite color or it's on sale for half price. The common sale purchase only works if you would actually have paid full price for the item in the first place; otherwise, it will likely end up being clutter.

Before investing in potentially more clutter, always ask yourself these questions: Why do I need this? Do I already have this? Will it serve a purpose?

REMEMBER

Decluttering does *not* mean going without. Losing clutter should be a relief, not something to be scared about. I know when you picked up this book you were already worried you might have to give up too much stuff or be asked to live so minimally that you'd only have one fork and two knives. That is not the case.

Removing clutter all around should make you feel more comfortable in your home, office, car, mind, or wherever you spend your time. If the act of decluttering makes you scared, don't give up. You simply need to change your mindset, and you're probably decluttering in a way that doesn't fit your clutterbug type or your lifestyle.

So why not practice getting better at identifying what needs to go? Start by dividing your belongings into categories according to how often you use them: Daily, Weekly, Sporadically, Rarely, and Never. By putting the items into these categories, you can visually see which ones you don't use. It helps calm the process and makes it easier and visual. You can use bins, boxes, or bags to organize these items.

You will likely keep the items in the first two categories, so find a permanent place for them. The key to decluttering is not only to get rid of things you don't use but also to make sure you have a spot for the things you do use.

I advise getting rid of the last two categories of items. You'll have to make a tough choice as to whether the sporadic bin is worth keeping. If the items are not practical, get rid of them!

REMEMBER

Stay positive and take mental breaks if needed, but keep decluttering.

TIP

When you let go of something, keep track of how much it cost originally. Don't do it to justify keeping anything. (Keep in mind that decluttering doesn't focus on how much an item costs, but rather whether it's useful.) This trick is simply to help give you perspective and prevent you from buying things you don't need.

Discovering how much money you're now donating or throwing in the trash may be depressing, but this exercise will help you save money in the future! You've already paid for the items, so the money is gone anyway. Use this tip to help keep you motivated to buy less and live better. I call the money you realize is gone the "sunk costs" of decluttering. You have to move on and do it swiftly. The trick is not to make the same mistake again.

Why minimalism works

In short, minimalism means less of everything. Less stuff, fewer bills, smaller dwellings — you get the point. And first and foremost, minimalism can save money and free up your financial resources. When you choose to live simply, you can be more productive and get an automatic financial benefit.

Minimalism does not mean you have to get rid of everything or you have to live in a sterile, all-white home with one expensive couch in the middle. That may be what you've been trained to believe, but minimalism in this book simply means thinking about getting rid of what you don't need. And then you can enjoy what you have more! It also means you can give more value to certain material things by buying less and focusing on quality rather than quantity.

Aside from the money savings that come along with minimalism, the time savings can be of even greater value, given that time may well be your greatest asset. You can spend less time dealing with all the extra things in your life and focus your time on the things you need.

In conjunction with more time and money, you'll have more energy as your refocused time can be available for other activities. The reduction of a highly materialist lifestyle can prove to be healthier and give you better results. Last but not least, you'll increase your efficiency. Less stuff, more time, more energy, and more productivity. It really is a no-brainer.

REMEMBER

I want to reiterate that you don't have to keep only one pair of shoes or one book to adopt this lifestyle. The great thing about minimalism is that the choices are yours to make, and you can do what works for you. You can choose what and how you want to downsize, and there's no right or wrong way to go about it. Once you start on this journey, you may find that you want to embrace it even more after seeing the benefits.

You don't have to figure it all out right away; the process can take some trial and error.

Knowing how much is too much

Many people ask me for some concrete rules to help them figure out whether they have too much stuff. Although this differs for everyone, I have some guidelines:

- **Constantly misplacing things?** When you are wasting time looking for items from keys to blouses to wrenches, this could be a sign you have too much clutter.
- **Do you have piles of stuff?** Clothing may be the most obvious thing to think about, but the concept applies to stuff in general.
- **Are you replacing stuff you have lost and can't find?** This is a clear sign of having too much clutter.
- **Are you purchasing items and then realizing you already had them?** When you start to have doubles and even triples of most things, chances are you have too much stuff. Two copies of the same book? Five pairs of similar shoes? Twenty boxes of crackers?
- **Are you always worrying about stuff?** For example, do you stress about having people over because they have to walk through your overstuffed, cluttered entranceway?
- **Do you have a difficult time knowing where to start?** Are you so overwhelmed with the clutter in many areas of your life that you can't even choose one spot to start?
- **Do you feel overwhelmed even thinking about decluttering?** Similar to not knowing where to start, do you feel overwhelmed about the entire process?
- **Are you always late paying bills and arriving at appointments?** This is another clear sign of clutter buildup.

- **Can you not use places in your house?** For example, can you not park your car in the garage?
- **Do you want to just start over because of clutter?** Maybe you're tempted to say "Forget it, I'm moving to Indonesia."
- **Are you renting a storage unit that you never get items from?** Clutter starts before you even rent the locker — if you're considering renting a locker, you have too much stuff. When you have a storage unit, you accumulate even more, and the longer you keep the unit, the more stuff accumulates. When you'd rather pay for a place to store your stuff miles away than let it go, you've reached a turning point. This also often leads to a waste of time and money.
- **Do your kids have so many toys they never know what to play with?** If you're overwhelmed by clutter, chances are your kids may be as well. Having too many toy choices is also known to hamper creativity, especially in the earlier years.
- **Do you find you never eat all your food because you over-shop and food goes bad?** This is easily done, especially in North America where we have massive fridges. Europeans, on the other hand, still shop daily and have less food storage space available, which automatically cuts down on food waste.
- **Do you have to move things to sit down?** This is an obvious sign that you have too much stuff.
- **Do you have more than one junk drawer?** I forbid junk drawers. I say having an essential drawer for rubber bands and matchboxes that you use is okay, but junk just accumulates, much like clutter.

Too much of anything can be considered clutter. If you start to accumulate too many shoes, for example, they may become an overwhelming pile of clutter that you never use. Similarly, a collection intended to bring you joy can turn into clutter if you're not careful. You may have to do some serious soul-searching to figure out how much is too much.

Taking stock of anything in your home that you have a large selection of is usually a good way to start identifying what may be clutter. What is the right amount you should have? That needs to be determined by your lifestyle.

Determining the right amount for your lifestyle

Items that used to be functional can turn into clutter, and this is where you need to get realistic about what you use. You need to be brutal with your real lifestyle — not the one you think you have or want to have. If you love camping and have every item possible but have not camped in ten years, it's probably not part of your lifestyle and you don't need those items. Having a fantasy about the lifestyle you want and keeping items "just in case" is a common downfall. Get realistic with your current lifestyle, not your past, fantasy, or future lifestyle.

REMEMBER

You can always repurchase something next year or ten years from now — for example, if you decide you want to start camping again.

Your lifestyle changes, and that's normal. When you have kids, you may no longer need your rock climbing or motorcycle gear because of time constraints, but if you do start again, there will likely be even better technology for you to get when that time comes.

Lifestyle changes happen to everyone, even those who are self-described minimalists. This is also completely normal as your life circumstances are always changing, and therefore your needs also change. If something was once useful and now you see it collecting dust in the corner, it's clutter. The thing about clutter is that what may have been useful or brought you extreme happiness in the past can now be clutter, making it even more confusing.

It's important to be diligent when decluttering, make it an ongoing process, and adapt to your lifestyle changes. You have to question items every time you use them, look at them, or pick them up. Be honest about whether you'll ever use your expensive motorcycle jacket if you sold your bike and don't really have a desire to ride again.

Another factor that affects your lifestyle is where you live. You own different items depending on whether you live in a city or the countryside, and how much time you spend in your home.

You obviously have too much stuff if you don't have room for it in your current dwelling. Even if you know or think someday you'll get a bigger place, if what you have doesn't fit in your current space, then you need to declutter today. Live in the present,

because chances are if you save items in anticipation of having a bigger space, they may have turned into clutter by then. This can be a really tough challenge, especially when you're downsizing to a smaller space. It doesn't seem fair that some of your belongings can't join you in your new smaller space. However, it's a blessing in disguise as it forces you to make tough decisions regarding what to keep. You also have to really assess your storage space in your new place and make sure that whatever you're storing isn't clutter and doesn't take up space for other important items. The bottom line is that your space does matter, and often the smaller the space, the more likely you are to be forced to declutter naturally.

REMEMBER

If something doesn't bring you happiness or you don't use it, then it's clutter and it has to go.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Getting clutter under control
- Planning for future shopping
- Being accountable
- Having fun in the process

Chapter 2
Forming a Decluttering Game Plan

It's time to draw up a decluttering plan. You may only have a few boxes of items lying around, or you may be ready to apply for the next episode of *Hoarders.* All of you have different life goals, and therefore different decluttering goals, to help you free up space, time, and stress.

I am not expecting total minimalism; I never said you had to fit your entire life into a backpack or have only one fork. My goal is that by the end of this chapter you will be ready to move on to the spaces in your home that need decluttering support, and you will have the tools and resources to start and make decluttering part of your everyday life. You will be ready to toss, donate, gift, repurpose, and basically get rid of things that do not serve a purpose in your life and are simply taking up precious space in your surroundings and mind.

Whether you want to downsize or upsize your surroundings, your decluttering strategy should relate to you getting back to the things you love and having more time to focus on your goals.

Effectively Dealing with Clutter

The quicker you are at dealing with clutter, the less likely it is to build up. I have found that once you are over the emotional hurdle of clutter, it becomes much easier to deal with. The next big hurdle is the sunk costs associated with the clutter. The value an item once had is gone, and in some cases, can be recuperated when you sell that item, but the lesson should be to be more wary of future clutter that may make its way into your home and know how to deal with that.

REMEMBER

Everything should have a place in your space. If you found a plate in the bedroom, you would immediately return it to its home without a second thought because you know it's not where it belongs. That should be the case with all of your belongings. If you have trouble deciding where something goes, it may be clutter that you need to let go of — and do it fast.

Being proactive versus reactive

You've probably heard the term "proactive" in business ttings and about your health or your studies. By dealing with things proactively, you can achieve higher results than by simply waiting to react when things come to you. This concept relates directly to decluttering as well.

Being proactive instead of reactive means that instead of waiting to let clutter build up or until everything is a mess, you take constant steps toward decluttering.

I am a big fan of the Franklin Covey group and the late author Dr. Stephen Covey, who wrote *7 Habits of Highly Effective People.* The number-one habit is being proactive. As the book states, "Reactive people believe they are not responsible for what they say and do — they have no choice. Instead of reacting to or worrying about conditions over which they have little or no control, proactive people focus their time and energy on things they can control." And I know that we are responsible for controlling our own clutter.

REMEMBER

Keeping a proactive mindset and creating a routine and systems can make decluttering an automatic part of your life.

Creating a system that you stick to

I talk about systems a lot, and you may already be thinking about how you can work decluttering into your current routine. Creating systems and routines that are an organic part of your life makes decluttering not only sustainable but also something you don't have to think about because it's an organic part of your routine.

And there is a reason you picked up this book. I don't want to get philosophical, but I suggest you start implementing the things you are discovering in this book right now rather than reacting to it as clutter builds. If you're in an emergency situation or having trouble dealing with clutter, have a look at Figure 2-1 to help you get started. Take a photo of the card and keep it on your phone or print and it post it somewhere visible. These simple questions can help you stick to your decluttering goals, and you will soon be asking them of yourself without even looking at the card!

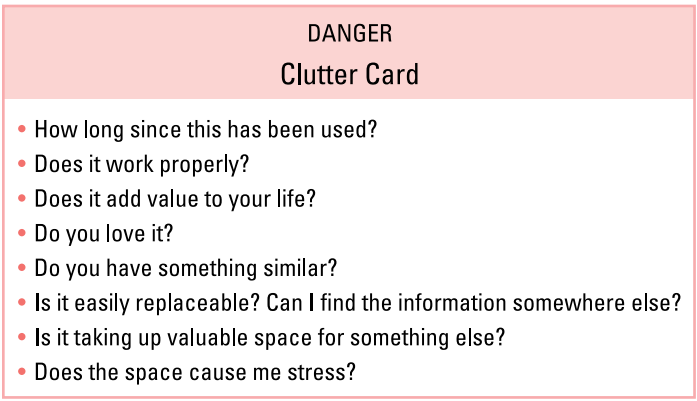

DANGER
Clutter Card
How long since this has been used?
Does it work properly?
Does it add value to your life?
Do you love it?
Do you have something similar?
Is it easily replaceable? Can I find the information somewhere else?
Is it taking up valuable space for something else?
Does the space cause me stress?

Image courtesy of author

FIGURE 2-1: Clutter danger card.

Maximizing efficiency

Regardless of how much you have to declutter, you want to be as efficient as possible when dealing with it. You want to feel in control of the process as much as the result. Here are a few tips to maximize your decluttering efficiency:

- **Start with one area.** This is advice I give everyone who starts on any organizing challenge, especially since at the

beginning you will not find decluttering pleasant. You may even find it stressful; therefore, you should start small. Start with one area. It should be your highest priority or the area that causes you the most stress or is the least efficient area of your home.

- **Give yourself a timeline.** As with any goal, you need to have an attainable date to finish so you don't get frustrated and give up.
- **Plan time.** In addition to completion dates, you need to plan the time you will declutter. Shorter time spans can increase your chances of tackling the project. It's amazing what you can accomplish in a set 15-minute declutter challenge. It will also feel more like a game or challenge, and all of us usually have a bit of a competitive edge, even when decluttering. Experiment with different amounts of time that work for you and then stay consistent!
- **Use time cubes to keep you on track.** Maximizing your time is so important that I sell time cubes on my website to promote efficiency. And I use them every day. Today we are so distracted by social media, emails, Netflix, kids, and so forth. Our lives are fast and busy, and distractions are always lingering.

  Figure 2-2 is an image of this simple time cube gadget that can help keep you on track for many tasks, including decluttering. The time cube is a very straightforward tool to keep you on task and better than a phone timer because you won't be distracted with texts, emails, or other notifications coming through. The primary task of the time cube is to count down the time. The cube has the numbers 15, 30, 45, and 60 on it, and when you place the number side up, it starts to count down and blink red. For some reason, when this timer is blinking at you, it keeps your mind focused. Like I said, it can take less than 15 minutes a day to declutter. Use a timer to keep focused on only decluttering efficiently, and don't leave the room or area during that time until the timer goes off. You will be amazed at the results!
- **Have your Donate, Sell, Toss, and Repurpose boxes ready.** I talk about these boxes a lot, especially in Chapter 3, which deals with closet decluttering. Trust me, I want you to buy or repurpose boxes with these labels on them. Yes, I am telling you to get some stuff; these boxes will continually remind you to Donate, Sell, Toss, and Repurpose. They will also aid in creating a decluttering sorting system that you can keep going.

Image courtesy of the author (photo credit: @avalonmohns)

FIGURE 2-2: Time cube in action.

- **Get rid of clutter.** Do this immediately because the longer clutter stays in your house, the more likely it will work its way back into your home and never leave. Arrange a pickup from a local charity if you're worried you won't be able to get rid of the items. Remember, getting rid of stuff is difficult for everyone, and you can keep the memories without keeping the stuff.

Avoiding the all-or-nothing approach

The all-or-nothing decluttering approach can be intimidating, overwhelming, and may even make you bitter. Here's how:

Intimidating

Choose a point of attack and then start with one item when you enter a room and decide on it as quickly as possible. Then move onto the next item. I know that many of us, myself included, are sometimes intimidated when we even hear the word "decluttering," and that is what I want to avoid. If you truly think of it in

terms of "I have to do it all today," then yes, decluttering will be intimidating. To avoid this, be kind to yourself and those around you and start small in sections or categories.

Overwhelming

Along with being intimidated, feeling overwhelmed is probably the most well-known emotion when we hear the word "decluttering." And that feeling of being overwhelmed — in many things in life, not only decluttering — is what causes us to not start something. We are overwhelmed with the amount of work it takes to start our own business, so we don't do it. We are overwhelmed with how hard the newest boot camp exercise class is, so we simply don't go. And we are overwhelmed just thinking about where to start decluttering, so we don't. All of these examples are proof that something great could come if you were not held back by being overwhelmed and started. So, again, you don't have to declutter your life in one day, just as you don't have to start a business or start with the craziest exercise routines right off the bat. Ease into decluttering the same way you would any of these tasks. Schedule daily and/or weekly decluttering into your calendar to hold yourself accountable and beat the overwhelming feelings.

Getting sick of it and feeling bitter

I promise you that if you stick to decluttering, you will get better at it, just like you will get in better shape when you start exercising. I always say start small and stick to it, and before you know it, you will be decluttering without even thinking about it.

And back to the old saying, "Rome was not built in a day." You can't lose 20 pounds in one day, and the same is true of decluttering. Small steps and lifestyle adaptions and changes will bring you to your goal.

The all-or-nothing approach is not sustainable for most people because it doesn't actually foster new habits.

Busting through the "I might" syndrome

Going back to the decluttering mindset, operating with scarcity beliefs not only holds you back from getting rid of clutter, but it also produces lingering stress because it makes you think of what

could happen. If you don't know whether you are this type of clutterbug, refer to the clutter personalities in Chapter 1 to see if you can relate to the personalities. You may be one or several.

Regardless of your clutter personality, *you need* to bust through the "I might use it someday" belief today — this very second — because if you have this mentality forever, you will be holding onto unnecessary clutter.

I am not going to lie; this is the hardest problem that most of us have when it comes to clutter; hence, why I keep bringing it up. And it is often linked with emotional reasons. For example, if you grew up not having a lot of money, perhaps you were conditioned to keep everything. Therefore, you hold onto things that may one day come in handy, even though they never do. No matter how much money you have or don't have, if you're not going to use an item in your current lifestyle, discard it swiftly.

Much of this stuff may be unusable anyway: unidentifiable cords, manuals, gadgets that you don't know what they are for. There is no use holding onto these.

Having random items also is touché for this syndrome. Maybe you look at that laminated hand painting an artist got you and think, "I can never buy it again, and what if someday I want to frame it and hang it in my house?" Chances are if you haven't hung it up yet, you won't.

And that's not to mention sentimental items, which are also tough as you really may never *need* them, but you *want* them to hold on to memories. But think hard about those broken eyeglasses your grandmother wore that bring you memories. Are they are worth keeping, or can you look at old photos of the two of you together where she is wearing the glasses instead?

So bust through this and get rid of clutter. Have you used it in a year? Do you have a recent memory of the item that brings you so much joy that you want to permanently put the item on display in your home? Ask yourself the difficult questions and then make some decisions.

Moms usually are known for having a "someday stash." If you're a mom reading this, now is the perfect time to make the change. If you're looking to help your mom declutter, use the techniques

in this book to ease her into the idea and help her get over the "I might need it someday" syndrome.

REMEMBER

Less clutter, less stress.

Choosing a Method for Future Purchases

I promise this chapter is getting more into the practical side of how to declutter and stay decluttered. I've said a lot about styles, reasons to declutter, and the benefits associated with decluttering, but now I want to give you some practical advice. One of the best pieces of advice I have ever received is about methods for not even letting clutter come into your home!

I can't bring back the costs you incurred for all the stuff you bought, but I can help you understand the concept of the sunk costs and give you ideas and tools to make more rational decisions in the future about what to keep, toss, and bring into your space in the first place.

And lucky you, today more than ever we can use technology to our advantage to help prevent clutter from building up in the first place.

Adding existing items to an app

Apps are my friends. I only have apps on my phone that I use at least weekly, as I don't want a cluttered phone. If you prefer lists or notebooks or Excel, that's okay as well; however, keeping up items entails more of a maintenance issue. For some people, it is still therapeutic to write in notebooks and make physical lists, and I am in no way saying that is wrong. I just like apps.

I want you to think about your recent purchases and buying habits. Is there an area in which you are purchasing too much or that's causing you stress? I am in no way saying put every single item of everything you own into an app because you wouldn't be able to have a life or job for a year if you did this. I am asking what your high-priority areas are. Where are you buying too much? Buying doubles? Stressed about having too much stuff? Start with this area.

For example, maybe your bathroom is always cluttered and causing fights between you and your partner or causing you to lose money because you can't find and use items before they expire.

Can you never find anything in your closet, so you keep buying to replace what you probably already have? If the closet is a big issue, I recommend skipping ahead to Chapter 3, which explains how to use apps to keep track of your closet inventory.

TIP

For mostly everything else, I recommend the Snupps app. Snupps keeps track of what you own on a visual organizer platform. You can make shelves for anything from clothes to collectibles. It has social sharing features so you can share with your communities.

With Snupps you can make shelves for all your items! But like I said, don't go overboard. Choose an area in which you always need to know what you have, so when you're out shopping, or even home online shopping, you can quickly glance at the app and say, "Oh yes, I already have four of those pale yellow vases, and I don't need a fifth."

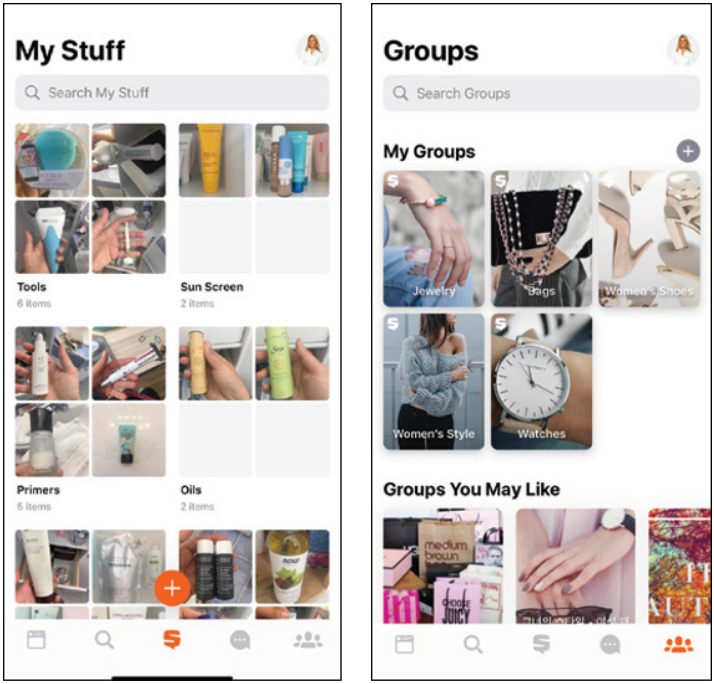
This tip has really helped me save money and time in my bathroom when it comes to skincare and makeup. I was a self-diagnosed makeup junkie and skincare whore, and I loved to have everything and keep it way past its due date, until a skincare outbreak due to expired products changed my viewpoint on how I needed to keep my bathroom decluttered.

In addition to keeping unsafe expired products, I was throwing away hundreds of dollars monthly because I didn't have a handle on the products that I had already and was just plain buying too much. Figure 2-3 is an example of my products in the Snupps app.

Having this app with me at all times saves me money, time, and my health, so I know it's a no-brainer. The initial investment of my time to input the makeup has been far exceeded by the benefits.

Switching from items such as makeup to something more digital, I want to discuss files.

Gone are the days when we need to print everything. Heck, gone are the days when we need to email ourselves stuff or carry around USB sticks. Digital files should be seamless from your computer to your phone, whether you are an Apple and iOS user or a PC and Android user, or a combination of both. I am average tech savvy, and I figured it out. Today I know what files I have on my decluttered computer, and I can bring them up on my phone/tablet when needed.



Source: Snupps.com

FIGURE 2-3: I love to use the Snupps app.

This is kind of like carrying around an app with all your items or a briefcase with everything you might need; however, it is much more efficient.

Searching for digital files and then trying to send them somewhere can be a major time waster. Make it a point to get your digital files organized and seamlessly available.

Scheduling shopping trips

We all shop. Some of us love it; some of us hate it. Being the latter does not mean that you buy less. Maybe you buy more to avoid shopping again.

Whatever love/hate relationship you have with shopping, the key is to make it intentional, whether you're shopping for food, clothes, cars, or vacations.

Have in mind what you need, what you already have, and of course your budget and purpose. If you're shopping aimlessly for a new blouse but don't really need it and can't remember what you already have, you're likely to buy more than you really need.

REMEMBER

Schedule your trips based on your needs, and as simply as that, you will be a lot less likely to buy on impulse and overbuy what you already have. Be intentional with all your purchases from this day forward.

Shopping online the right way

I love online shopping, and it has definitely made me more efficient. Who doesn't love shopping without leaving your house? Yes, some people have argued the cost of shipping, but when I factor in gas prices, the wear on my car, and my time, I always prefer paying the shipping and having it delivered right to my door. Plus, today there are many ways to acquire free shipping, although some of them are triggers for buying more, so be careful.

Scheduling your online shopping

Just as I advise scheduling your physical shopping trips, I suggest you schedule your online shopping.

Scheduling allows you to think ahead, plan what you actually *need,* and avoid making random purchases. Since we schedule everything else in life, why don't we do the same with online shopping as well?

The best way I have found to schedule online shopping is to put it in your calendar. If you're using a digital calendar already, that is a bonus: You can enter the websites you plan to buy from in the notes, so when a window pops up for your 30 minutes of online shopping, you already know where to go.

Perhaps you need to do some research before you buy, which is wonderful, but set time limits. You can get lost in analysis paralysis and end up wasting time and being more confused than when you started. Before you research, know your needs and budget, and then set the timeline to decide.

Now, many of you are probably thinking, "Well, when I saw the Instagram pop-up for the teeth whitening solution, I bought it in literally ten seconds, and it saved me so much time." Yes, perhaps,

but did you really need that teeth whitener, of which you already have ten that are not used? If you want to whiten your teeth, it's probably best to schedule a shopping trip either online or to the store to buy this product so you will be ready to use it when it arrives! The moral of that story is that today we are inundated with products coming to us, and with the web basically watching our every move, we are targeted with hundreds of ads weekly that are usually curated to our style and taste. And I am sure this trend will keep going; marketers having access to our wants and needs is making it easier and faster to sell things to us. I have no problem with this concept, because when I truly need something, I love it when it shows up and I can easily buy it. But we need to be disciplined about our wants with this type of targeted marketing approach.

Therefore, schedule your online shopping because it's easy to go from being super-productive on your computer to shopping online for a useless gadget you don't need but are now consumed with reading hundreds of reviews about. Don't go down that hole; stop yourself. And never randomly shop online when you're bored, tired, or stressed. The 3 a.m. purchases I have made are the worst clutter I have accumulated.

Unlinking all your payment methods

While I stress that shopping trips should be scheduled, today it is overly easy to just hop onto a site and start shopping. And having the extra convenience of all your credit cards and PayPal info saved can be a great timesaver but also can be extremely costly with regard to accumulating more clutter.

We all have our payment methods linked to everything! Of course, this makes sense for recurring purchases as a timesaver and ensuring we stay on track; however, try to not do this for anything online shopping–related.

TIP

Unlink your payment methods now, or the next time you're online shopping, you may be buying too much!

This is one of the best tips to help you minimize your online shopping sprees. If you need something, you're likely to be ready, and you can grab your credit card from your wallet to input your credit card info. If you are just shopping on the fly and the prompt asks you for a credit card but you're not willing to get up or during

the time you walk to get your wallet you change your mind, you probably didn't need the item in the first place.

Online shopping can be more efficient because today stores don't always carry items or sizes you may need, so they suggest buying them online. It is annoying when you take your time to visit a store only to be sent home to buy it online. Avoid this by starting online.

WARNING

There are times when you need to physically visit a store, and that's okay too. Sometimes you have to see how the item works, compare it to another model, or try it on for size. Whatever the reason, just make sure the trip is scheduled.

Holding Yourself Accountable

With all this great advice, you may be wondering how you actually follow it. You are probably thinking, "Yes, I will never make another unscheduled shopping trip again!" But then, alas, you do. So how do you stop yourself?

Listing your items

List what you need. Simple as that. Make a list in your notebook. On your smartphone. In your agenda. Just do it. I love lists!

Finding an accountability partner

Ask someone to help you as with anything else in life! We need a person to help us along the way just like we need tutors, personal trainers, mentors, teachers — whatever it is, we just sometimes need to talk to someone or get advice. And decluttering is no different.

TIP

Find a friend, family member, co-worker, neighbor — whomever you can share your decluttering goal with — and ask that person to help you along the way. Trust me, people love to do this and will likely also get motivated themselves to declutter. If you were to tell your neighbor that you want to declutter your garage this summer and ask him to help keep you accountable, I'm sure he would oblige.

You can ask your accountability partner to be on the lookout for you getting too much new stuff or to help you declutter what you have. You can even ask for help reviewing what you have when you're planning to buy something new.

I guarantee by the end of your decluttering challenge, your accountability partner will be right there with you decluttering her life, and then maybe you can keep it going with other areas.

Using the emotional versus practical checklist

When you're decluttering, I can't tell you what items are practical, what are emotional, and what are trash because these are personal decisions, but you can use the following questions to help you decide. I encourage you to be honest with yourself in making these decisions.

Is it practical?

- Do you use this item on a regular basis?
- Does it provide value to your life?
- Can someone else use it?

Is it emotional?

- Are you keeping this because of a memory?
- Do you have similar items attached to this memory?
- Is the item a gift from someone special but something you don't use or like?
- Would your friends or family see the value in this item?

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Formulating a strategy
- Making the most of your closet space
- Organizing accessories
- Taking seasons into consideration

Chapter 3
Decluttering Your Closet

Most people laugh when I say that I love organizing and decluttering closets in my spare time. From the time I was a small child, my closet was always the focal point of my bedroom. Growing up in rural Canada, our shopping options were limited, so for me it was less about what was in the closet and more about how it was set up and my organizing strategy, and of course, it was always clutter free.

As my love for fashion grew and I was able to move to a larger city for college, I started to shop a lot. This was when I knew I needed to have a constant decluttering closet strategy to not only keep my closet organized but to keep my shopping habits in check (a girl could only have so many Forever 21 tube tops). I used to spend Saturday nights decluttering and reorganizing my closet instead of joining the clubbing outings. Friends would be in awe of my closet and would garner my advice and tricks any chance they got. This is where I developed my signature tips, tricks, and closet organizing processes, which have since become a profitable business.

Your closet is one of the first things you see in the morning, and it's also the hidden time waster that, once refined, can increase your overall confidence and save you time and energy. Creating a decluttered, streamlined closet can help you stay focused, productive, and efficient — starting first thing in the morning. Closet

decluttering also frees up space and helps you save time getting ready every day. Finally, it benefits others when you donate pieces you haven't worn in years. Follow the steps in this chapter to change your closet habits, optimize your space, and refine your style to save money and fit your lifestyle.

Creating a Closet Decluttering Strategy

Recent studies show that when people hear the word "declutter," 50 percent of the population think of their closets, which often triggers emotions regarding purchase regrets or even financial concerns of overspending on items (some closets could have funded a down payment on a house or been used to help pay a child's college tuition). Decluttering can also be difficult for people who haven't determined their signature style because it often leads to hanging onto extra items they "might" need one day.

My advice to get started is simple: Push your resistance to the side, dive in, and determine ways to keep your decluttering momentum.

Diving into the decluttering process won't magically make everyone better or smarter consumers when it comes to closets. The high associated with getting new clothing is hard to forget, and this makes it even harder to start because you also have to change your ongoing habits to sustain the process.

WARNING

Decluttering involves being brutally honest with yourself about more important things than which shirt to keep. Going back to developing the decluttering mindset, the closet relates to bigger-picture topics including finances, consumer habits, and breaking the cycle of binge-shopping and then purging.

Here are a few strategies to help get you started:

- **Commit to regularly evaluating and tossing things as needed as opposed to only doing yearly decluttering clean-outs.** Your commitment to constant decluttering versus one-time purges will also drastically help with keeping track of new purchases, taking inventory of what you already have, and avoiding overbuying.

- **Determine a strategy for how to make closet decluttering a habit.** For example, schedule quarterly decluttering sessions on your calendar to stay on track.
- **Compartmentalize categories to start with rather than your entire closet.** For example, start with your shoes, then your handbags, then your work attire. This process helps you avoid that panic of feeling like you have nothing to wear if you declutter your entire closet at once. Tackling categories can also help give you a sense of accomplishment when you complete each category.
- **Avoid immediately replacing items as a result of the potential "empty closet syndrome."** Decluttering your closet can make you feel lighter and more organized, but it won't immediately change your purchasing habits. Make sure you stay mindful in your decluttering habits to avoid impulsive purchases post–closet overhaul.
- **Envision the rewards of not only how much time you will save in your closet but how much better you will feel with the carefully selected pieces that remain.** Having a carefully curated closet helps you feel appreciative of the items you own. Knowing exactly what you have will also encourage you to take better care of your clothes.

Executing Your Closet Decluttering Strategy

After you've determined whether you're doing a complete closet overhaul, a quarterly decluttering session, or tackling your closet by categories, the next step in the closet decluttering process is creating a strategy to help you feel lighter and save time and energy. Your strategy can help you feel successful and focused in both your work and personal life.

REMEMBER

For example, when you're assigned that next travel assignment for work, you'll feel confident accepting it as you won't have to think twice about packing. Knowing exactly what you're going to wear every morning will help you better tackle business meetings, boss mindsets, and networking events. You will notice immediately how much less effort it takes to not only show up to work but

perform better. Your newly decluttered wardrobe will give way to time-saving and confidence-boosting routines.

For personal trips, you will enjoy not only the packing process, but the unpacking process because you won't have excess clutter left over in your suitcases or in your closet.

I place a lot of emphasis on planning, which I think is important for decluttering any space from both physical and mental standpoints. But then you actually have to dive in and declutter, and the closet is sometimes the most overwhelming. To give you extra motivation, start with the following exercise to help you further commit to getting started.

Trying the time-wasting closet exercise

You want to be as efficient as possible, so it's important to determine how clutter is affecting your time. Most often, closet clutter is the reason that people are chronically late, struggle to figure out what to wear in the morning, or even waste time and energy during the day worrying about what to wear.

TIP

The best way to figure out how much time you're actually wasting in the closet because of clutter is to track this time for a week. You don't have to track everything you do in the closet, but simply track your daily closet habits regarding decluttering. Here are some tips to get started:

1. **Make notes on your phone about how much time you waste in the morning.** Are you spending time rifling through drawers trying to find an item you lost?
2. **Record the actual time on specific categories of clothing.** This step will help prioritize which items are the biggest decluttering time wasters. See Figure 3-1 for a shot of my recent time-wasting analysis.
3. **Analyze which areas of the closet cause you the most stress.** You'll likely find you're spending the most time on the areas that are most cluttered.

Now is the time to jump in and start the decluttering process. You can start small, making it a daily ten-minute task, or choose one category to start with and do a complete overhaul. If you are choosing the latter, ensure you have blocked enough time in your calendar to jump in with no distractions.

DAY	Wondering what to wear	Looking for a specific item	Re-ironing/ re-washing	Changing outfits	Travel packing
Day 1	10	20	0	0	0
Day 2	0	0	10	0	0
Day 3	20	0	0	0	0
Day 4	0	10	0	0	0
Day 5	20	0	0	5	25
Day 6	5	5	5	0	0
Day 7	0	0	0	10	0
TOTAL	55	35	15	15	25
Grand total = 145 minutes					

Image courtesy of author

FIGURE 3-1: The results of my time-wasting exercise.

Finding the happy clothing balance

Getting your clothing balance correct can often require years of trial and error. What I mean by *clothing balance* is having the right amount and type of clothes that you use daily for your lifestyle. The amount of time needed to find this balance is an individual exercise, and there is no specific time frame that can be prescribed. Finding a balance between what you should or want to be wearing and what you actually *do* wear is difficult. Breaking these actions into the following steps can be helpful:

1. **Review your lifestyle.**

   Accounting for both your work and personal life, what do you wear the most? Is it work suits, jeans, or activewear? Is there something that you should be wearing more for work or personal purposes?

2. **Determine your needs.**

   After you categorize your needs and what you're actually wearing, do you find you have too much of one clothing item that you don't need or should not be wearing? Are there any key items you want or need that are missing? Categorize clothing as work or personal and then determine the amount of time spent in each. In some cases 80 percent of your clothes may be for office-type work, and hopefully they're a bit versatile to also wear for personal outings.

3. **Circle back to what you currently wear.**

   Hopefully it fits into your work and personal lives. If not, determine what you need, and be realistic!

Optimizing Your Closet Space

You are probably thinking that a small closet is easier to declutter, but this is not necessarily the case. Larger spaces let you see more of the items inside, which can cause less clutter to build up. However, on the flip side, larger closets can also be the reason you accumulate so much stuff and feel the need to fill the space. The moral of this paragraph is that closet space alone is not the reason clutter builds up.

If you have a small closet, don't get discouraged because there are plenty of ways to streamline and organize the space to make it seem bigger. The first step when maximizing your closet space is to declutter; then with a few products, installations, and decorating tips, tiny closets can be the perfect size.

Taking inventory

Without knowing your inventory of closet items, it is inevitable that you will acquire more clutter or "stuff" than you need. Taking inventory of what's currently in your closet will automatically help you declutter! Assess each piece. If it's not worth keeping track of, it's not worth keeping.

Here are a few top ways to take inventory in your closet:

- **Get an app.** There are tons of closet apps on the market. It may seem tedious, but trust me, it is a game changer. Not only will you have your entire closet with you when you shop, but it also makes trip planning easier, encourages you to continually declutter, and keeps you conscious of how much you are adding to your closet with every new purchase.
- **Take photos.** If technology is not your thing, or if you're too scared to make the commitment to document every piece of clothing, take photos of each section of your closet. Although less detailed, photos can give an overview of what you have and can be used for basic inventory purposes.
- **Make a list.** Old-school methods still work. Using a notebook or an Excel spreadsheet to list your items can be helpful, but it can be a lot of work to sustain and doesn't give you a visual overview.

» **Review quarterly.** I am an advocate of quarterly decluttering regardless, but if all the preceding points don't work for your lifestyle or you aren't ready to fully commit to an inventory tracking system, review your closet inventory quarterly and make the best mental notes possible.

Evaluating your space

While you may dream of 500-square-foot closets, adding closet space is not necessarily the best approach to decluttering. Less space naturally forces you to be more conscious of what you are putting into that space. I recommend evaluating the space to make sure it fits the clothes you want to keep and that your existing clothes have a well-designed home. You want your space to reflect your needs and optimize your efficiency. Evaluate whether you need to add or change the space to make it easier to grab items, or add another section if there is not enough room.

REMEMBER

There are no guidelines for how much closet space a person typically needs. A small New York city dwelling might have the tiniest closet space, but the person living in it might work in fashion and have more clothing needs than someone living in a larger house with less clothing needs or interests. (However, given that my mom is an architect, I know a few important closet dimensions that can be considered "typical," which I discuss in the following sections.)

To properly use your space, you may need to create more hanging or shelving space depending on what is needed for your items. Closet organization is a big business with do-it-yourself packages available at home improvement stores or Ikea; professional consultants and custom builders are available to those with a bigger closet budget. Whichever way you go, there are some basic closet organization ideas you can apply to your situation.

Organizing a walk-in closet

Walk-in closets can vary in shape and size depending on your home's layout. If you do have the chance to design your closet, it's a great time to work in your specific lifestyle clothing choices and build around them. This way you will have the appropriate rods and shelves versus too much shelving, which then prompts you to buy more if the shelves look empty. Typical walk-in closet shapes are square, rectangular, and L-shaped.

The key is to design a solution around your already decluttered items that fits your current needs and lifestyle. I have seen many large walk-in closets that are clutter free, and it usually stems from the owner doing thorough planning and also making the space part of their home — something that they are proud to show off with no fear of guests seeing a cluttered mess.

Organizing a reach-in closet

Reach-in closets are typically found in smaller bedrooms and apartments. They are usually rectangular and approximately 8 feet long. They are perfect for single users, and with decluttering strategies, I have seen these closets fit most people's needs. The key to organizing a reach-in closet is to be sure to plan for seasonality, if it applies, as sometimes modifications or extra storage space may be needed for seasonal items. Your goal with the reach-in closet is also to make it part of the home and not be afraid to open it when guests arrive. This is a sign of a peaceful and clutter-free space.

Determining what to hang and fold

Don't underestimate the importance of deciding what to hang and what to fold! If you have four shelves full of folded pants, it may be time to reevaluate whether you need them all. If you have no room for your hanging blouses because your pants are taking up all the hanging space, this is another opportunity to reevaluate what to hang and fold. Keep in mind the type of clothes you own and what takes up the most space. Do most of your clothes hang or need to be folded? If you mostly wear sweaters and t-shirts, you need a lot of shelving. If you mostly wear a lot of collared blouses and dresses, you need plenty of hanging space.

I don't want to go into details of what to hang or fold since this book is dedicated to decluttering rather than organizing. So I suggest you declutter first and then make sure you are properly hanging and folding what is needed. Following are my guidelines to help you get started.

What to hang:

- Pants with a crease (pants without can be folded)
- Blouses made of any material (iron and button top, middle, and bottom buttons)

- Jackets
- Blazers
- Slippery silks and satins
- Clothes made of delicate fabric
- Most dresses
- Camisoles

What to fold:

- Sweaters
- Knitwear
- T-shirts
- Jeans
- Sweats
- Lingerie
- Special dresses (things that are heavily beaded, or dresses similar to a Hervé Léger bandage dress)

Donate, Repurpose, Tailor, Sell, or Toss?

TIP

During the inventory process, I recommend labeling a few boxes "Donate," "Repurpose," "Tailor," "Sell," and "Toss." When you have your boxes, you can place your items in the appropriate box as you go through them and accomplish multiple steps at once.

- **Donate:** As Chapter 1 discusses in detail, donating should be at the heart of your decluttering mindset. Being able to donate your items to benefit others not only helps your closet but also helps you improve other people's lives. In our consumerist society, you need to be aware of not only how much you are buying but how you can further your belongings' sustainability. Donating doesn't just mean giving away items to your local thrift shop; it can also mean giving items to neighbors, friends, and family. I often schedule friends' dates where we swap clothing — over champagne, of course! As long as your items are in wearable condition, someone should be wearing them!

- **Repurpose:** An often-forgotten part of decluttering is that a multitude of closet items can be repurposed. Clothing can be cropped, cut, changed, added to, or even used for cleaning rags once it's unwearable or stained to the point of no return. Jewelry can be melted into other shapes and sizes, scarves can be used for decorations, and leather boots can be used for repair patches or made into smaller leather goods.
- **Tailor:** Tailoring can mean so much more than getting your jeans hemmed. I'm guessing you won't wear clothes if they don't fit properly. Even if you love that special blazer, you won't wear it if it hangs weirdly or looks boxy. Find a good tailor and bring in items that you're not ready to part with but never wear. Trust me, a good tailor can work wonders for your decluttering habits.
- **Sell:** This advice may sound contradictory to my first point of giving clothing to others who may benefit, but this point is still valid. I suggest you resell valuable, lightly worn items. This approach is a great way for fashionistas to keep wearing the top trends and be able to frequently switch styles. There are many apps, online consignment stores, and retail stores that sell lightly used items. Strike up a relationship with a consignment store if you have many items or start your own online store on apps like DePop. Remember, preloved items are a great way to recapture a bit of your money if you want to be on top of trends but not have a closet full of never-worn items.
- **Toss:** At some point, closet items will no longer be usable. They may be too stained, ripped beyond repair, or just plain overworn such that you cannot sell, donate, tailor, or even repurpose them. At this point, you can toss these items.

TIP

The best way to stay on track with decluttering via this box method is to keep the boxes in your closet as a daily, constant reminder to continue decluttering. For years, I've suggested to clients, friends, and family that they label a few boxes in their home to make decluttering part of their daily routine.

Decluttering will happen naturally when you make this process a habit. An hour of closet updates every quarter will keep you on track and hold you accountable.

Another key to staying on track is to recount how you feel when you actually declutter. Especially with donations, it's important to realize that your decluttering is benefiting others. If you journal, take notes of how your feel after a closet declutter; likely, these small actions will help keep you motivated to stay on track. Here are a few more ideas to hold yourself accountable:

- **Schedule weekly calendar pop-ups.** A weekly reminder, even if only five minutes, titled "Closet Declutter" will keep you on track in your decluttering mission.
- **Create quarterly friend dinners and decluttering sessions.** Sharing your task with friends adds a fun, team aspect to decluttering.
- **Have prescheduled pickups for your donation items.** This ensures that your items actually get donated instead of sitting in the garage for weeks.
- **Get your family or school involved by arranging donation drives.** Having a support system makes the decluttering process much easier. Schedule a few donation drives so you're held accountable to your goals.

Decluttering Accessories

Accessories can often make up the remaining clutter that causes the most stress, so don't skip this important step! The small things can cause more clutter than larger items, and having perfectly organized boxes for all your accessories is useless if you never use them or forget you even have them and end up buying more.

The following sections walk you through the ins and outs of decluttering your different types of accessories.

Sorting your seasonal shoes and boots

Most of my organizing advice centers around creating systems that work for your lifestyle, and shoe and boot storage is no exception. I always suggest sorting through your shoes as the starting

point for decluttering accessories. I recommend categorizing the process as follows:

- **Sort by type or occasion.** My advice usually centers around sorting by similar types, colors, and usage. Shoes and boots can easily be sorted into type and/or occasion. For example, you can organize by exercise shoes, daily work shoes, and special-occasion shoes. Boots can also be further broken down into height, warmth, and function.
- **Sort by usage:** Seeing all your boots and shoes lined up by how much you use them makes you more aware of which shoes and boots you use and which ones to declutter. Sorting by usage also makes you aware of which shoes are overworn and helps you keep a rotational system going to evenly wear your footwear. Look inside every shoe box to really figure out what what you currently have.

REMEMBER

When you have your boots and shoes sorted, it will be easier to declutter more efficiently. As with most of my other advice, make shoe decluttering a habit by doing it quarterly or seasonally.

Decluttering your handbags

Handbags are my true passion. (Full disclosure: I cringe when I have to declutter handbags.) It is perfectly fine to have one handbag for all occasions and many others based on your style or needs. My advice is to update and evaluate your handbags to make sure they are efficient, fit your current lifestyle, and add ease and purpose to outfits.

Note: For men, this section may seem useless, but there are many "man bags," such as briefcases, travel backpacks, and duffel bags. Therefore, handbags in this book are unisex.

Decluttering handbags should involve thorough analysis of what you need for staples, what you currently have, and whether you're in the handbag game strictly for purpose or for investment and fashion. The differing approaches to handbags will determine your decluttering style.

Which of the following handbag users are you?

- **Purposeful handbag user:** Someone who solely has handbags for purpose versus style will have a very streamlined

collection, and decluttering is usually a simpler process. Keep that which is functional and you use 80 percent of the time. You still may have a few staples; however, your primary concern is function and that the style and color fit with most of your outfits.

- **Fashion handbag user:** If you collect a variety of different handbags based on fashion trends, decluttering is very important; otherwise, you will end up with a handbag wasteland.
- **Investment handbag user:** Classic handbags can become not only wardrobe staples but also investment pieces if cared for properly. Keeping these bags stored properly away from clutter preserves them and ensures you are using them enough. Ideal handbag storage features plexiglass dividers, which allow all items to be viewed, accessed, and properly stored.

Decluttering your handbag

I am by no means going to attempt to list what you need or don't need in your purse; all of us have different needs, and there is a reason why most magazines and social blogs ask celebrities what's inside their purse on a monthly basis — it's fascinating to know what other women carry in their purses!

What is also fascinating is the amount of clutter that can end up in your purse and stay there for years. I think purse decluttering is very important for a variety of reasons, including your health, because carrying too much can cause pain in your back, neck, and shoulders and can lead to worse problems.

I want to help make sure your purse stays clutter-free and practical; you don't want your purse to resemble a junk pit or be a time-wasting item because you can never find anything.

From my experience, you are either one of two types of handbag users: You have multiple handbags in different sizes, shapes, colors, and textures for different occasions. (Of course, you have decluttered your handbags to make sure the ones you have are actually used, but you enjoy switching handbags for special occasions or even daily.) Or you have one handbag you use every day for all occasions.

If you are like me and switch your handbags for occasions, this does not mean you're off the hook. You still need to practice some handbag decluttering tips. Typically, if you are switching handbags constantly, they are naturally more decluttered because you have to move items from one handbag to the next on a regular basis, and this in itself helps to prevent clutter. However, when moving items between purses, don't just move them. Check to make sure you're moving things you actually use!

If you carry only one bag consistently, you need to make an even more conscious effort to do a thorough edit of what's in your handbag.

TIP

Here are some suggestions to help lighten your purses:

- **Go through your handbags quarterly.** This is especially important if you don't switch handbags. A quarterly declutter session should be the minimum frequency you declutter your handbags. The more often you declutter, the less stuff you accumulate!
- **Go digital.** As much as possible, avoid carrying too many coins or cards. Keep store membership numbers in your phone, and avoid carrying too much cash.
- **Use see-through pouches.** If you like to carry essentials with you in your purse, instead of having them loose, consider a see through-pouch. This way, you will be reminded of what is in it, making it easier to declutter.
- **Consider a handbag organizer.** If you switch your purses often, consider investing in an organizer that you can transfer from one to the next. However, this still means you need to be mindful to declutter the organizers.

Storing your scarves

Another big accessory that seems to be daunting on the decluttering front is scarves. From winter to summer, scarves are an understated fashion and practical accessory that have challenged organizing gurus for years! I keep my larger scarves on scarf hangers, and I fold my smaller silk scarves.

TIP

Here are my top tips for scarf decluttering:

- **Take inventory.** Similar to inventorying clothes, find a way to do this for scarves. An app, photos, or lists are helpful. Physically taking inventory of them helps you sort which ones you want to donate, repurpose, tailor, sell, or toss.
- **Be brutal.** The number of scarves you own can sneak up on you. Try them on and ask yourself whether you wear them. If it helps, take photos of yourself wearing the scarves and ask your friends for advice.
- **Determine what's sentimental.** If you have sentimental scarves passed down from friends or family members, make a special box for them and store them in a safe place. I recommend putting a see-through lid on the box or a photo on the outside so you can keep track of what is inside.
- **Consider what's real-estate worthy.** If you have expensive scarves that you never wear, consider selling them.

Decluttering jewelry

Jewelry is an interesting and often overlooked part of the decluttering process. It's easy to forget about because it doesn't take up much physical space. Jewelry can be highly sentimental, valuable, and often has hidden meanings.

First things first, you need to fully commit to a jewelry declutter because it's important not to have things hidden in boxes or drawers that you don't wear or even remember that you had.

One major step for jewelry decluttering goes back to finding a style balance and how much you accessorize. Some people love to change accessories daily and have pounds of jewelry for every occasion. I refer to this jewelry as costume jewelry, not because you are wearing it for a costume, but because it helps to distinguish between more expensive jewelry that is usually purchased from a designer or reputable jeweler versus jewelry from a store selling many accessories. It's not a bad thing to wear many different accessories; this is simply a style choice.

Whether you are constantly changing your jewelry to match your outfits or you stick to your staples, decluttering strategies are necessary. Consider the following factors:

- **Frequency of use:** Sorting by frequency of use automatically helps you declutter your jewelry. Determine what your

staples are and what you wear once in a while, and declutter accordingly.

- **Repurposing potential:** I mentioned this advice for clothes, and the same thing can be said for jewelry. If you don't wear a certain piece, make it into something else, give it to a friend, or sell it.
- **Storage possibilities:** How you store your jewelry determines how you can continue to declutter. Jewelry stored in boxes tucked away at the back of your closet will continue to be clutter, and you will likely get more. Have your jewelry visible and easy to access. If you need to keep your jewelry stored in a safe because of its value, having it visible may not be an option, but keep valuable safe real estate free and clear of lingering clutter.

Belts

I added this section about belts because I am always amazed by how this accessory is often forgotten. We seem to have more belts than we need or that even fit. Go through each and every one of your belts and resist the urge to keep the ones that "might fit" someday or that you "might" wear with certain pants that you don't own.

Everything else

We have lots of other items that make their way into our closets. Stick to all the tips I have given you so far, the biggest being that if you don't use it or wear it, it is clutter. Evaluate and move on.

Planning Seasonally

Effectively planning for each season ensures that you're ready and excited for the next season.

My motto is quite simple: If you haven't worn something this season, will you wear it the next? Many factors likely come into consideration: emotional, practical, financial, and fashion. If after two seasons it still has not been worn, then maybe some stronger questions need to be asked. I'm not saying to get rid of your classic cashmere coat that you didn't wear for two seasons as chances

are you might wear it again, but the pink puffy jacket you haven't worn for two seasons is likely a different case.

Seasonal items fall into the following categories:

- **Day-to-day wear:** What are your staple items? This clothing should be assessed quarterly, and if you move to a different seasonal climate, make sure you declutter for that season.
- **Sporting attire:** Some sports are seasonal, and related clothing, such as ski attire, should be stored when it can't be used. If you didn't use it, evaluate it before you store it.
- **Vacation staples:** These items may be part of your seasonal routine if you vacation at the same time and place annually, or if you have certain staples you always take on vacation. However, when you return from trips, make sure to note what you did not use or wear and declutter immediately.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Avoiding trends leading to overfilled cabinets
- Monitoring your spares
- Taking stock of towels

Chapter 4
Decluttering Your Bathroom

Bathroom clutter is often forgotten behind closed cabinets or drawers, and products are often expired or no longer needed when you finally deal with it. I wish I could see a show of hands of who is thinking about their overflowing bathroom cabinets right now. Consumer research shows that bathroom cabinets are now filled with more than 140 million products! Cosmetic trends also have our bathroom cabinets filled to the brim. And to make matters worse, I bet you have multiples of the same product in your bathroom, which is not only clutter but could be a dangerous mess if left too long.

This chapter explains how to cut back on the clutter in your bathroom. Not only do I address what bottles, tubes, and containers to eliminate from counters and cabinets, but I reveal just how many towels you really need.

Decluttering Your Products

I love decluttering bathrooms, mine and other people's. Call me crazy, but bathrooms usually are the smallest rooms in most homes and they can be the messiest, so decluttering them brings

me intense joy. I'm also a recovering makeup junkie. I used to spend hours poring over the latest *Seventeen* magazines when I was a teenager to learn new techniques and read about the best new beauty products. When Sephora came to NYC in 1998, it was like a dream, and I wasted so much money on countless products that I didn't need or had similar if not the exact same items already. To sum it up, my addiction was real, and it was only when I became an organizing expert that I realized I had a serious problem and completely changed my makeup and skincare shopping habits.

The point of this story is that your bathroom shopping habits have a lot to do with how cluttered your bathroom is. It is quite similar to the garage in the sense that your habits and hobbies have a lot to do with the amount of clutter you accumulate. You may not think of skincare and makeup as a hobby, but tell that to the countless makeup YouTubers making seven figures on their delightful monthly favorites and product reviews.

WARNING

As you may have already realized, bathroom decluttering goes deep into your bathroom cabinets as well as your habits around grooming and lifestyle. Yes, it is sometimes a sensitive subject. From pill poppers to makeup junkies like my former self, this decluttering subject may make you deal with some of your inner bad habits that can be worse than the junk drawer syndrome that I discuss in Chapter 5.

However, I am here to help you work through this. You may not have any bad habits, in which case this will be a straightforward chapter. Maybe your only bathroom possessions are your toothbrush and a comb, and in that case, you can skip this chapter altogether. Alas, for the rest of us, don't get discouraged and declutter on. I am confident that the dreaded bathroom cabinets will soon emit a clutter-free, zenlike serenity that the entire bathroom should reflect.

TIP

Here are a few strategies to help get you started:

- **Avoid storing multiples.** I think being prepared for anything is important, from earthquakes to having spare toothpaste so you don't have to run to the store at midnight. However, I don't agree with storing multiples of all your bathroom products and certainly not more than one extra of each. If you're at Costco and you see your exact moisturizer on sale

in a package of 20, think twice. Will they expire before you're even ready to use them? Will you switch moisturizers next month? Will your skin type change? Are you willing to give up the precious real estate in your bathroom for these to sit for possibly years?

- **Let your bathroom real estate guide you.** Often, I caution against space — just because you have a 1,000-square-foot attic doesn't mean you have to fill it! The bathroom is usually the only room in the house where I say that space should help you determine how much stuff you can keep. And more often than not, especially with newer modern bathrooms, there is actually less storage space. So let this be the first sign to declutter.
- **Your bathroom is not Sephora.** This was a hard one for me to grasp. I loved to have every lip color, collagen treatment, and newest face massaging gadget. But you don't need endless numbers of products that essentially do the same job or are the newest trends. As I mention earlier, you can have a spare of your essentials, but that's it. Do an inventory of how much you have and how much it cost you, and you will soon realize how much money you're wasting on bathroom products! The bathroom can be a serious money pit!
- **Let go of the past.** I talk a lot about this concept, especially when dealing with sentimental items, and bathroom products are no different. You don't need to keep the prescribed throat spray for that strep throat you had five years ago. That special shade of eyeshadow you wore at your wedding ten years ago and haven't worn since? You likely won't wear it again, and neither will your daughter. Ditto the overpriced beard oil you bought two years ago but always forget to use. Bathroom decluttering applies to both genders. Even dogs somehow have more shampoo selections than I did when I was a kid.

Determining your essentials

Now that I got through the tough stuff, I want to focus on what really is essential, and I mean *really* essential. I want you to remember that bathroom items are easy to replace, find, and source. The pharmaceutical and cosmetic industries are two of the largest industries in North America; therefore, you can replace

anything. Plus, they continue to innovate. This is one area of decluttering that you can freely declutter knowing that tomorrow you could buy ten more items easily if needed. Keep this in mind as you work through the chapter.

The medicine cabinet is a good place to start.

Medicine cabinet

Now, chances are you have lots of items — not only medicine — in this cabinet, and I challenge you to focus only on medicine.

Go through all your cold remedies, prescriptions, pain relievers, and whatever else you have stored and check expiry dates first and foremost. Then toss what you have not used in the last year. Yes, even the NyQuil. You may say, "But I could get a cold this year." Yes, you could, but you also could not. And chances are your local pharmacy will have an updated cold medication if you need it.

When it comes to medications, I even get a bit scientific. According to a study at the University of California, many staples that you have in your medicine cabinet, such as nasal sprays, eye drops, and even some lotions, have ingredients that can inhibit *mitochondria* (the part of our cells responsible for making energy), which is a bad thing. This can lead to many diseases and even affect fertility. Therefore, you really don't want to keep more products than you need. It's hard to determine which products are harmful from ingredient lists, but any ingredient that ends in "ammonium chloride" is best to stay away from if possible.

WARNING

When medication is prescribed, it's usually for 7–14 days and should be completed, so in theory you shouldn't have any left over to declutter. But I have done this, and you may have too — you don't finish it and think you can use it the next time you get sick. This is very dangerous, and using medication without talking to your doctor first, even if you have taken it before, can lead to misuse, development of antibiotic resistance, and susceptibility to other diseases, plus you may not be getting the right treatment for what you actually have.

So what is the best way to quickly declutter your medications? Taking them back to the pharmacy is the best advice because pharmacies professionally dispose of them. Don't flush them down the toilet because this can contaminate our waterways.

After you have decluttered your medications, determine if your medicine cabinet is actually the best place to store the medications that you are going to keep.

Most medicine should be stored at room temperature — 68 to 77 degrees — and kept away from moisture. My bathroom does see moisture, especially when I shower, and most bathrooms are prone to higher temperatures and humidity, making them poor places to keep drugs. So after you declutter, consider moving your medication out of the medicine cabinet or your bathroom in general. And whatever you do, keep the label or box. You want to avoid a cluttered mess of unidentifiable products.

Toothbrush and essentials

I strongly advise that you only keep products you use daily in your bathroom. Separate the stuff that you use each and every day — toothbrush, toothpaste, shampoo, and so on — from the stuff you don't use daily, such as antibiotic cream and first-aid supplies unless you're sterilizing cuts and icing bruises daily, in which case you may have bigger problems than a cluttered bathroom.

TIP

Consider keeping your toothbrushes away from anything that splashes or sprays. Instead, put them in a see-through holder that can be easily cleaned, and set them in a safe place to avoid dirt and buildup.

Setting strict timelines for product lifetimes

After you go through your dangerous medicine cabinet and determine what is truly essential, set timelines for all your products. Coming up are the guidelines I try to follow. These are just my guidelines — you might disagree, which is fine. Some expiration dates are actually set by the FDA, hopefully for safety reasons and not to sell more products. If nothing else, seeing these expiry dates may make you think twice before you buy and store too many multiples. The bottom line is that if you don't use something in your bathroom, it is clutter and it should go.

WARNING

Any products that have been compromised by heat or light can expire even faster! The more you focus on only essentials, the less you need to worry about extensive expiry lists!

Makeup

Following are my recommendations on how long to keep makeup:

- **Mascara:** Three months — yes, that is right. I cry sometimes when I think about this. (***Disclaimer:*** I keep mine for about six months, but three months is the recommendation.) Otherwise, you can be at risk of an eye infection, and I have one friend to whom this has happened!
- **Liquid eye liner:** One year; again, due to the risk of eye infection.
- **Eyeshadow:** Powder forms can last up to three years depending on the quality. Liquid eyeshadow has a shelf life of one year, after which it starts to separate.
- **Lipstick:** Up to three years. Lip gloss may start to separate after one year, especially the thin cones. Lip balms can actually last up to five years.
- **Blush:** Powders can last up to three years; creams usually one year.
- **Bronzer:** Up to three years.
- **Foundation:** This is a tough one because it depends on the type. Oil-free foundations usually last only a year, while ones with oil can last up to two years. Follow the manufacturer's recommendations.
- **Concealer:** Liquid forms last up to one year; powder up to two years.
- **Other powders:** Up to two years.

Everything else

We often forget how long we've had miscellaneous bathroom products. Create a system to help you keep track of when your items are expired. Here are some guidelines to follow:

- **Moisturizers:** Up to two years; however, check the expiration dates because sometimes products in jars are pretty but not properly packaged, so they expire faster than they should. How manufacturers package moisturizers can make a huge difference in how long they can last. You now see many lotions in darker glass bottles for this very reason.

- **Sunscreen:** One year (this is actually federally regulated).
- **Acne products:** Any products containing benzoyl peroxide will only work for three months.
- **Anti-aging products:** It depends on the ingredients, but anything with vitamin C, retinol, or glycolic acid tends to break down pretty quickly. It's best to stick with six months.
- **Shampoo:** Unopened shampoo should last for three years; however, remember you don't need to buy a bunch of extras. Once opened, shampoo is good for two years. The same rules apply to conditioners.
- **Deodorant/anti-perspirant:** Up to three years, but check expiry dates.
- **Toothpaste:** Check the expiry date because most toothpastes contain fluoride and this ingredient expires.
- **Soap:** Usually up to three years; the same applies to body washes.
- **Shaving products:** Up to two years. It's important to note that depilatory and bleaching creams usually only last for up to six months because of their harsh ingredients.
- **Nail polish and remover:** Some say that nail polish remover actually never expires, which may be a good thing because it's one of those things we don't usually use daily; however, nail polish usually goes bad in under two years.

WARNING

I tried to be comprehensive with this list; however, I also want to mention that organic or all-natural products, which I recommend if you have the option, expire much sooner! You really need to watch them because their ingredients expire very quickly due to the use of less chemicals in their recipes. Even more reason to keep a clutter-free bathroom if you are into organic products!

Minimizing unwanted products

It may seem repetitive to determine your essentials, but now I want you to go a step further. I'm going to help you with four quick questions to help make your bathroom product decluttering easier.

Ask yourself these questions:

- **Do I use this?** This should be a quick yes or no answer. I did not ask you if you will possibly, maybe use it one day.

- **Is this a duplicate or extra?** Of course, you can have a spare for your most-needed supplies, emphasis on most needed. But how many extra lotions do you need? Do you really need to keep that sparkling lip gloss? Remember the timeline of beauty products from the previous sections and think hard about whether you need to keep that extra. Perhaps you can donate it or pass it along to a friend who would love it!
- **Would I buy this right now?** Chances are you're keeping some things because you feel bad about the money you spent on them. Toiletries and beauty supplies can be expensive, but this question can help you analyze without considering cost. Think hard about your products, the color, the way it works or doesn't work for your skin type, and whether it's as effective as you thought it would be. If you wouldn't buy it again right now, then it is clutter and it's time for it to go.
- **Is the space worth it?** Are the products taking up precious space? Can you transfer them to a different container or make them smaller, remove the packaging (except medications)? Or declutter extras? The bathroom is often the smallest space, and therefore real estate is very precious.

The following sections provide some more simple tips.

Cosmetics

Go through all of your cosmetics, keeping in mind the product expiry noted earlier. Then go through the nonexpired items and determine whether you use them. I know you have some beautiful colors that look better in the case than they do on you. Keep only what you use and give the rest away to someone it might look great on!

Makeup brushes

When I buy a complete set of makeup brushes, I end up using only one or two. If this is the case for you, discard the remaining ones you don't use. This is also a great time to clean your makeup brushes because this often isn't done consistently. The less you have, the easier it will be to keep to a regular cleaning schedule.

Hair accessories

Go through these with a fine-tooth comb (don't mind the pun). I know scrunchies are back in style, and you can tell me you should have kept the ones you had when you were in eighth grade. But think back — would you really wear that scrunchie from 20 years ago? And chances are the elastic wouldn't work anymore! With many trends, we sometimes wish we'd kept something, but trust me, 99 percent of the time, we wouldn't use or wear it. Toss hair accessories you don't use.

Skin care

Be brutal with skin-care products. Many of you will pick up a product and think, "Oh I wish I used that more" or "If only I used this every day, I wouldn't have these fine lines." If you haven't used it consistently, chances are you won't start. Again, check expiry dates and test products to make sure they still smell right.

Nail polish

If stored properly, nail polish can last quite a while, but do you use it? Or do you get your nails professionally done? Check for clumps and proper consistency.

Medication

REMEMBER

I want to reiterate this point: Swiftly get rid of expired or unused medication, and remember that you probably should not be storing it in your bathroom anyway due to temperature fluctuations and steam caused by showers and baths. Don't forget to properly dispose of medications at the pharmacy rather than flush them.

Appliances/gadgets

Sort through your hairdryers, straighteners (do you have two?), shavers, face massagers, nose clippers, or whatever other bathroom gadgets you may have. These are usually items that you hold onto for "someday," but if you haven't used something in the last year, what are the chances that you will? I suggest even treating yourself to a treatment instead of buying the equipment. For example, instead of buying a foot bath you use twice a year, why not get a pedicure for the same price?

Hair brushes/combs

I have a pet peeve about hair and dirt buildup in combs. Sometimes when I see combs that are full of hair or other debris, I get a bit sad. I suggest the less you have, the easier it is to keep these clean. Go through the ones you use and toss the rest.

Knickknacks

Decorative items sometimes make their way into the bathroom, but I suggest taking a hard look at these items and determining whether they are taking up valuable space. Could you replace a purely decorative item with something more functional instead?

Trial sizes

Back in my makeup junkie days, I was also addicted to trial sizes, especially all the free ones that the makeup counters would give me. I convinced myself I needed to have a stash for my travels, but alas, I never used them. Be honest about what you use. Often you can donate these if they're unopened or give them to friends who run an Airbnb because they love to have travel sizes for their guests!

Perfume/cologne

Perfumes and colognes are other items that may be better stored outside the bathroom due to temperature fluctuations. I have heard various recommendations on how long you can keep perfume, ranging from one to five years. Review all your bottles and what you actually apply. If you have more than you can use, this is a great item to donate to a friend because everyone loves getting a new scent. Pass along the scent love!

Bath accessories/toys

Often large bathtubs can be real estate for fancy bath mitts, loofahs, bath bombs, and fancy bath bubbles we rarely, if ever, use. Plus, if you have kids, how many bath toys do they have that line the bathtub walls? Check these items for mold, which can easily grow on things that sit on damp surfaces, and then discard what you don't use.

First-aid supplies

As I mention earlier, I don't recommend storing these supplies in the bathroom unless you're super accident prone and use them daily. Go through your supplies and see what you need to restock

and what you never use. Chances are you have no Band-Aids but enough alcohol swabs to swab the neighborhood clean. When an emergency does happen, you want a well-stocked first-aid kit. And one you can find, not lingering behind other clutter!

Other personal stuff

We all have other products we use or think we might use. Go through your entire bathroom and discard as needed, keeping in mind all my tips thus far.

REMEMBER

It's easy to rebuy cosmetics, toiletries, and medications. They are readily available and better to rebuy than hold onto because these products can expire or their chemistry can easily be altered. Why risk it? Declutter now, and if you do happen to need a similar item one day, trust me, you can get it.

Determining what you need versus what you think you "might" need

Getting the right products in your bathroom can take trial and error. Just when you think you have a routine, your favorite product is discontinued or you need to change based on your skin's changing needs. It is a balance to find out what works best and what to keep.

There is no specific formula or time frame that can be prescribed to help find the actual products you might need because our bodies and lives are always changing. So to help at least find what you need at this current moment and break free from your current clutter, I have put together the following general tips:

- **Enlist support.** Get a friend or even a professional to help you choose the right products for your skin type. Check in twice a year like you do with the dentist, as your skin can change, resulting in the need for different products.
- **Buy smaller sizes.** The smaller the bottle, the less chance of expiry and the higher your chance of finishing it.
- **Research.** You may spend time researching what you eat because food goes into your body. What you put on your skin also enters your body, and you should know what is in your products. Trust me, the more you research and find out about the hundreds of chemicals in bathroom products, the more likely you'll be to make your list of products much smaller.

Decluttering Your Towels

I think towels are worth discussing because they're some of the most important items in the bathroom, and we use them multiple times a day! We use towels for bathing, to dry our hands, to remove our makeup, to stand on, to wipe sinks down, and so forth. You may not normally associate towels with clutter because you use them so often and they are a necessity. However, while this may be true, you can also make some thoughtful decisions about your towels, whether you are buying new ones or on a mission to declutter your existing towels.

Many people ask me, "How many towels do I need to keep?" There is no universal answer, but I can give you general advice and factors to consider on this topic.

First things first, take a good, hard look at your towels and see what shape they are in. If they are in bad shape, can you use them as rags instead? Can you donate them if they are still in okay shape? Use them for your furry friends? This is the obvious towel clutter that you should be able to swiftly deal with. The harder towel clutter is related to how many you need.

TIP

To determine how many towels you actually need, I like to limit the number of towels used by myself and guests because I don't want to waste more water washing them all the time. Track how many towels you use in a week, and see if you can challenge yourself to use less. Not only is it more environmentally sustainable to use fewer towels, it also helps you save money due to constantly putting them through the washing machine.

Keep it simple

Each person in the household should have at least two full sets of towels. That can include a large bath towel, hand towel, and face towel. You may want to get a few more face towels for each person because faces are likely washed more frequently. Plus, I keep two additional sets on hand for guests. This is my rule of thumb to keep it simple. This allows for one set to be available while the other one is being washed. Many people, including myself, don't mind using a bath towel more than once before it needs to be washed. Like I've said, this practice can also help save the environment one towel at a time!

REMEMBER

Hang up wet towels to make sure they dry properly before the next use.

TIP

My biggest keep-it-simple tip is to find a color/brand you like and stick with it. This way, towels are easier to replace, and you don't need to buy 50 of them at once. I prefer all white; they're easy to bleach, replace, and find.

Finding your staples

To further my advice on keeping the quantities simple for everyone in your household, I also believe in keeping the colors consistent.

Here are some things to consider:

- **How many people live in your house:** As I mention in the preceding section, your rule of thumb should be two full sets of towels per person.
- **Your laundry frequency schedule:** Whether you do laundry daily or twice a month affects how many towels you need.
- **How many bathrooms you have in your home:** If you have one bathroom, it's simple. When you have ten, you need multiple hand towels at the very least.
- **Guest frequency:** If you have guests every weekend, you may need more guest towels than if you have guests every few months.
- **How much space you have to store towels:** Having more space doesn't mean that you have to keep all your towels, but if you literally have no space in your bathroom, consider decluttering more.

Staying consistent

Consistency is key. If you manage your towel inventory per household capita, it should make your towel decluttering efficient and sustainable.

A few other consistency tricks are to find ways to repurpose your old towels so you can declutter them easily. You can demote them to cleaning rags or garage rags, or they can be kept in kids' rooms

for spills or art projects. From car cleaning to dusting rags, old towels can always be repurposed.

If your towels are still in good enough shape and maybe they don't match your theme, they are a great item to donate. I love donating because then the item not only physically leaves your home but you are also passing it on to someone who probably needs it more than you do.

If your towels or washcloths are too dirty for you to use yourself, likely they are not able to be donated. But if they have a fray or are just a bit worn out, they can be given to animal shelters, homeless shelters, or thrift stores.

Prepping Toiletries for Travel

When you travel, you usually take a few things with you. I find it extremely important to be ready and decluttered for this occasion. Nothing is worse the night before a trip than having to squeeze products into tiny travel containers, or worse, having to check a bag because you're bringing all your lotions, potions, and bathroom supplies.

I challenge you right now to get your travel essentials prepared, even if you don't have a trip planned. This way, when you do travel, you'll have all your necessary travel items with you. You can basically grab 'em and go. This is where you can use all your travel sizes, but don't go crazy. You tend to use less while traveling, so bring the essentials in small, ready-to-go sizes. When you're back from your trip, replenish what you used and declutter what you didn't use because you probablt won't use it next time either. Store travel items in a simple, see-through, TSA-approved bag.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Sizing up your space and needs
- Keeping the optimal number of items
- Banishing junk drawers

Chapter 5
Decluttering Your Kitchen

How often have you visited someone's kitchen and wondered how on earth they keep it looking so perfect and decluttered? This may be extra confusing if this person has a large family or hosts weekly dinner parties.

However, the amount of time you spend in your kitchen or the number of people reaching into your refrigerator should be no indication of how cluttered or uncluttered your kitchen is. If you eat out seven days a week and never set foot in your kitchen, then basically everything in your kitchen is clutter!

Many of us use our kitchen at least three times daily, or at least spend a significant amount of our time in our kitchen. Even if you have a big house, the kitchen is the usual spot where families and dinner parties always seem to congregate. Perhaps your kitchen looks perfectly decluttered until you open your drawers, or maybe your kitchen surfaces are jam-packed with appliances, vitamins, and overfilled glass jars of dry condiments.

There are many different kitchen needs, and the kitchen can often be the most challenging and daunting room in the house to declutter. But don't fret! I am here to give practical advice that

you can use today. Just remember: Start small. Even ten minutes of daily decluttering adds up to five hours of decluttering every month, which will surely help you get on track and stay on track.

There are two ways to lessen the feeling of clutter in your kitchen: Add more storage or have fewer items. In this chapter, I talk about how to improve your kitchen storage and also encourage you to keep only what you really use.

AUTHOR SAYS

The advice I give in this chapter can pertain to any level of cook or chef. I understand that if your passion is cooking, you will have a few more items in the kitchen than perhaps the average cook, but the principles of clutter remain the same. If you are an avid chef, take this chapter with a grain of salt . . . no pun intended.

The Basics of Kitchen Decluttering

First and foremost, I want you to think about what you're doing in the kitchen the most. Your kitchen should work *for* you, and if you have items you never use in the middle of your counter and your most-used gadget tucked away, you need to reevaluate their placement. I encourage you to make some tough decisions in this chapter. For example, items that don't necessarily look that pretty but are highly functional may need to take a spot front and center in your kitchen.

Before you dive into this chapter, think about what you use every day and what you actually do in the kitchen. Cooking, making tea, whipping up a smoothie, and creating a new baking recipe all require different equipment. This chapter is all about *you* and making sure your kitchen works for your lifestyle.

REMEMBER

The amount of time you spend in your kitchen should not have an impact on how much stuff you have! If you spend hours cooking, it doesn't mean you need to have every new appliance or gadget that is marketed to make cutting onions less sad. Spending more time in the kitchen means you have to consistently spend more time evaluating what you actually use. Your kitchen has to fit your lifestyle, and if your lifestyle changes, you have to adapt. As your cooking habits, dietary needs, and family size change, you will reach for different tools, appliances, and kitchen essentials. You'll need to keep decluttering and add it to your routine. At the beginning of this process, decluttering may feel like a constant

challenge. Don't worry — soon it will be an organic process that seamlessly fits into your life.

Here are a few strategies to help get you started:

- **Don't have endless multiples.** I know you have more plates, mugs, and cups than you need. You may not have enough of one kind or way too many of another. Go through these and sell, toss, donate, or repurpose the extras.
- **Consider functionality versus aesthetics.** You can get carried away making your kitchen look really pretty. Focus on only what you use and need on a regular basis.
- **Evaluate your storage.** Is your storage and layout space the most efficient? Most of us tend to use what is already in our kitchen, but I encourage you to think about what would make the most sense. Today there are lots of easy ways to update your storage space.
- **Optimize your items' positioning.** Kitchen items should be positioned so you can see what you have immediately. This is especially important for food because it has an expiry date, and not seeing what you have only adds to food wastage.
- **Be practical.** It's important to think carefully when putting items away. Even if you have a see-through cupboard, that bright bowl you reach for every day should be front and center even if it doesn't match the rest of your décor. This is also important for heavy items or special-occasion items.

Evaluating your space

Today many of us live in tiny apartments, condos, or small homes, and they usually come with a small kitchen. Even some larger spaces have smaller kitchens because they were not properly designed or were rebuilt. I want to make sure that whether you have a large or small kitchen, your space is as efficient as possible. The first step is to declutter your kitchen items and get realistic about what you need.

TIP

Try not to accumulate kitchen gadgets or devices linked to food fads and trends. If your friends gift you items because you're a foodie, perhaps mention you would like more experiences as gifts rather than "stuff." You can let everyone know that you're on

a decluttering mission to avoid accumulating more items. For example, foodies may like cooking classes or restaurant gift certificates instead of another set of cutlery.

Dive into some practical ways to evaluate your spaces:

- **Take a look at your cupboards.** If you have so much stuff that your cupboards can't close properly, you are not using your space as efficiently as possible. Try to reduce the amount of stuff you own and then determine how you can optimize storage. Consider installing shelves; reducing packaging; and storing goods in jars, bins, and baskets that take up less space. Beautiful, tall glass jars can look nice and actually take up less space.
- **Be logical.** Are super clunky, barely used gadgets taking up too much space? When evaluating space, you have to be ruthless. Yes, you might use that juicer one day, but have you used it in the last year? In the last six months? Be brutal when evaluating these larger gadgets that we often hang onto because they were a gift or we think we might use them one day. The good news is that if they still work, you can likely sell them!
- **Evaluate your stockpiles and bulk.** Do you have so much food that you don't have space to store it all? It's important to have dried and canned food on hand for emergencies; however, is your space optimized for this? Can you build a higher shelf for these items because you're not reaching for them daily? And even emergency supplies should be decluttered and restocked annually because your needs may change.

  Before you go crazy with your stockpiles, try to buy only what is really necessary. Trips to Costco can leave any kitchen stuffed to the brim with too many of one item and items so large that they don't even fit on your shelves. Don't buy something in bulk just because it's on sale; buy items only because you need them.

Following are tips for storing goods more efficiently:

- **Stock "like" items together.** This may seem like a no-brainer, but it's also the best way to evaluate whether your space is really working for you. If you have so many one of product that it's overflowing and none of another type of

food item, why is there an entire shelf devoted to the one with the least amount of stuff?

- **Stock "related" items together.** Similar to the preceding tip, keep similar, related items together as well. This includes items such as your baking supplies or ingredients for dishes that you are always cooking. Storing related items together instantly makes your space more efficient.
- **Keep items close to where you need them.** Keep things as close as possible to where you actually use them. For example, keep your spices near your stove if you're always adding spices to your stovetop items, or move your knife blocks close to the place where you always chop and dice.
- **Evaluate the inside of your cupboards.** Don't forget about the amount of space your cupboards have to offer. Installing a few racks can be a simple trick to better use empty space.

Determining your needs

Getting clear on what you need is the basis of kitchen decluttering. If you aren't careful, your kitchen can easily turn into a giant storeroom.

The amount of kitchen storage should ideally depend on what and how much you have. The more items in your kitchen, the more items you need to store. In the next section, I go into specific rules for the proper number of items and how to keep an eye on volume levels. For now, I focus on your kitchen needs.

REMEMBER

Every kitchen is as unique as the person, family, or tribe it supports. This means that every kitchen has unique uses, and those uses can change, which makes consistent kitchen decluttering extremely important. If possible, I suggest decluttering your kitchen quarterly.

Ask yourself these questions to get started:

- What is the current size of your household?
- How often do you cook?
- How often do you entertain guests?
- What area of your kitchen is the most inefficient?
- Which kitchen storage area is the most stuffed or overflowing with items?

- Is your storage efficient? Do you have to walk far to get what you need?
- Which cabinets and drawers are used most?
- What other stuff is in your kitchen that is not related to cooking? For example, do you have paperwork, computers, laundry detergent, or mudroom supplies stored inefficiently in your kitchen?

Now pay close attention to how your kitchen is currently organized and make a simple list of what you know could be improved. Use Figure 5-1 to note these improvements.

KITCHEN DECLUTTERING IMPROVEMENTS

MOST USED KITCHEN AREAS

-
-
-

Top ways to improve these areas

-
-
-
-
-

Image courtesy of author

FIGURE 5-1: Kitchen improvements list.

Next, you need to take inventory of your entire kitchen before you can fully measure its improvements. You've already thought about what you do in your kitchen; now it's time to go through everything thoroughly. Make a checklist if you need to, and take note of the items that you have. A checklist can be a great way to quickly review your inventory of stuff, most of which falls into the following categories:

- Small appliances
- Food storage
- Preparatory items

- Utensils
- Silverware
- Pots and pans
- Bakeware
- Glasses, cups, and drinking items
- Dishes
- Serving ware
- Flatware
- Linens
- Storage containers
- Cleaning supplies and tools
- Bulk storage
- Management/home office
- Miscellaneous

Don't worry, this does not have to be exact and can be done in under 15 minutes. It is more of an exercise to get you started on the decluttering process, because as you go through the list and add your own items, it will quickly become clear where there is excess. Another useful exercise is to go through your food in your pantry, fridge, and freezer — I encourage you to do this quarterly. Use the checklists in Figure 5-2 to help you with your food inventory.

I trust the inventory list helped you to declutter a few things as you were going through it. The next section gives you some very general guidelines on how many you should have of selected items.

Now, it's time to declutter even more. Kitchen decluttering is especially important because not only does it help with kitchen hygiene and cleanliness, but it can also bring increased energy, creativity, and motivation for staying healthy and cooking healthy meals.

Ask yourself these questions as you go through your items:

- Do I use this item?
- Is this an extra?
- Would I buy this again?
- Does this help to make my kitchen life more efficient?

KITCHEN INVENTORY
Take note of how many you have

PANTRY	Quantity	Notes

KITCHEN INVENTORY
Take note of how many you have

FRIDGE	Quantity	Notes

Image courtesy of author

FIGURE 5-2: Kitchen food inventory checklists.

KITCHEN INVENTORY
Take note of how many you have

FREEZER	Quantity	Notes

FIGURE 5-2: continued

Optimizing Your Kitchen for Efficiency

One of the most important ways to optimize your kitchen is to make sure you have only what you need and that your efficiency and accessibility are dialed in. You want items that you use every day conveniently located, and you want everything to go back to its rightful spot after you use it.

Functional for the win

Your kitchen needs to be as functional as possible. The best way to optimize your kitchen for your functional needs is to categorize the storage areas based on the following examples. Some of these categories may not apply to you, but do your best to use the ones that do:

- Consumables
- Non-consumables
- Cleaning
- Preparation
- Cooking
- Baking
- Serving
- Herbs
- Others

Decluttering the right tools

I don't want to give advice on what you need or should have in your kitchen, but I want to get specific about everyday tools and go through the ones that can lead to clutter:

- **Dish towels:** I know as soon as you read this, you're either thinking you need to purchase more dish towels or that you already have too many. Whichever thought you have, go through all your dish towels and discard ones that are past their due date; if they're torn or ragged, get rid of them. Then evaluate what you have left and whether you use them. See if the ones you're discarding can be repurposed for cleaning rags, donated to thrift stores, or given to animal shelters.

- **Mixing bowls:** Go through these and eliminate what you don't use or what you have in excess.
- **Spices:** Going through your spices can be a messy job, but you have to do it. I bet there are a few that you have never used or have maybe even expired. Try keeping only the spices you actually use, as you can always rebuy a spice if you want it again down the road, or purchase a small amount in a bulk section if you need it for something specific.
- **Storage containers:** I am not sure why there is a lid monster in every kitchen, but that's just the way it is. Go through all your storage containers and discard any without a lid. The better the quality of your containers, the surprisingly less often the lids go missing. Maybe it is because you take better care of quality items or you're more careful overall, but investing in good storage containers will help you be more mindful of their uses.
- **Cutlery:** I am sure you have a few stragglers that you don't use, or sets that aren't complete or are missing all the little spoons or a few forks. I suggest donating the cutlery that doesn't match your set so everything has a streamlined and organized look.
- **Medicine:** If you store medication in your kitchen, make sure that it is away from steam from ovens or kettles, and either stored or locked away from anyone who should not be accessing it. For more on decluttering medicines, flip to Chapter 4.
- **Vitamins and supplements:** It took me years to finally develop a consistent vitamin routine, and this not only saves me hundreds of dollars in vitamins I don't need or forget to take, but is also making me a healthier person. If you take supplements or vitamins, make sure you are keeping only what you actually take. Get rid of anything you don't take consistently. I got help from an expert in nutrition to help me figure out my vitamin needs, and I now only buy the ones I need. It is very easy to fall into the latest trends with vitamins and buy things that "promise" to make your hair stronger, reduce your body fat, or instantly clear your skin. Check with a professional before starting any vitamin regime to keep your clutter at bay and your wallet happier.

- **Cookbooks:** Go through these and keep only what you use. This is tough because you may think you'll need one as a reference someday, but be realistic and remember that the Internet has a recipe for everything.
- **Cleaning supplies:** Whether you store these in your kitchen or not, chances are a few cleaning supplies are always in your kitchen. Don't keep a huge stash of items or multiples. Make sure each item is labeled properly and store only what you actually need in the kitchen. Move the bathroom cleaners to the bathrooms and any other specific supplies to their respective places.
- **Bakeware:** I get that you used to love to make muffins in the shape of hearts for your kid's Valentine's Day bake sales, but do you use them anymore? Anything not used should be tossed, sold, repurposed, or donated.
- **Oven mitts:** Chances are, you have one oven mitt that you have used since you graduated high school. If this is the case, consider upgrading your oven mitt or minimizing the number you have.
- **Aprons:** I believe in using aprons because they help keep your clothes clean. Go through your aprons and only keep the ones you use.
- **Coffee mugs and glassware:** Only keep what you need. Do you use the mugs with your kids' pictures on them from 2011? Maybe these are sentimental items, and if they are, they should be stored with other sentimental items instead of in the kitchen. Most people have a lot of mugs or glasses, but you only need one or two per person in your house. The next section talks about optimal levels for these items.
- **Gadgets:** Don't save those impulse-buy kitchen items if you don't use them. Get over their sunk cost; donate, sell, toss, or repurpose them, and move on. I want you to assess all gadgets, even things like your microwave — if you have only used it once in the last year for popcorn, is it really necessary in your kitchen?

WARNING

Many people ask me about decorative items in the kitchen and whether they are clutter. For example, nicely labeled spice jars or glass jars with pasta can be decorative even if they aren't often used. I can't tell you what decorative items you should keep because how you style your kitchen is a personal choice. I can, however,

warn that decorative items may be taking up valuable space for items you actually use. Also, anything decorative needs to be wiped down more often than it would in another location because it gets dustier and could be splashed while cooking. Whether you keep or discard decorative items is up to you, but keep these considerations in mind when they're in your kitchen.

TIP

Decluttering cutlery and utensils is a great way to start quickly, won't uproot your kitchen, and will give you a sense of accomplishment.

Setting volume levels

Many people ask me exactly how much of each item they should have in their kitchen. Although this differs for each person, I have some general guidelines, which I offer in the following sections. But the short answer is: You need enough dishes for a daily meal and a few extras for spares and guests.

Knives

The essentials are usually a chef's knife, a paring knife, and a bread knife. You probably have others as well that you use frequently and store close to where you use them. If you have multiples of knives, consider donating them. If they are poor quality or broken, discard them. Quality knives are important for chefs or avid kitchen cooks, so prioritize quality over quantity.

Dishes

I refer to these in sets. There is no golden rule of how many sets of dishes you should keep, but I try to have enough plates and bowls in each set for the number of people who are in my house eating regularly and the number of meals a day that are served. Of course, it depends on the size of plates you use. Maybe you use smaller dishes for breakfast and larger dishes for lunches, but these should all be part of a matching set. I recommend you clean your dishes after each use so you don't need excess sets while your dishes are dirty. Whether you have a dishwasher may affect the number of sets you have. If you're the mom who is hosting kids all the time, maybe you need more of a certain size plate for the time being. Think about your lifestyle and then be ruthless with the number of sets you actually need.

TIP

A special note about sets. When you buy a full set of, for example, eight dishes but there are only two of you in the house, you don't necessarily have to keep them or store them in your kitchen. You may opt for an alternate storage space and then get more when needed or keep them to replace broken ones.

Holiday stuff

Do you have special Christmas tree plates you use every Christmas? If so, store them with your Christmas decorations instead of in your kitchen. Be mindful of how many holiday accessories you are buying; if you buy new ones every year, they could add up quickly to much more than you need, have room for, or actually use. Plus, I believe less is more when it comes to holiday decorating.

Kids' stuff

I grew up using the same utensils and plates as my parents, but I was born before the huge marketing boom took place for kids' accessories. My parents were also European with very strict manners around food — I was never allowed to make a mess or use my fingers to eat! These days, kid-friendly dishes can come in every cartoon character or animation that has ever been produced. The key is to declutter these as soon as they're no longer needed or when your kid outgrows them. These items are great to pass along to other moms if they are still in good condition. Resist the urge to keep them as sentimental items or for your future grandkids. Just don't go there.

Silverware

Your silverware drawer is likely the most opened drawer in your home. I call it silverwear out of habit, but it can also be called cutlery. Since we use silverwear so much, it generally doesn't make sense to minimize this (let's be honest — we need more than one fork). To begin decluttering this drawer, I suggest taking everything out and doing a deep clean at least quarterly. With this being one of the most used drawers in the household, it also accumulates the most dirt and usually has the greatest number of different people's hands rummaging through it.

TIP

Here is a calculation to help you determine how much silverware you need: Multiply the number of people in your house by the number of meals you eat by the number of times your run your dishwasher (skip this step if you don't have a dishwasher). This

means that even if you only wash your dishes at night, they will all be ready the next morning.

China

Some of you may have special-occasion china. Perhaps it was gifted to you, you collect it, or you simply like it. Again, if you use it, then keep it. But don't hold onto it because it was an expensive gift and you feel bad about getting rid of it.

Coffee mugs

Coffee mugs are a tough category, and again I give you a calculation rather than a number.

If you never have guests: Multiply the number of people in your household (who use mugs) by the number of mugs they use per day by the number of times you run your dishwasher (skip this step if you don't have a dishwasher).

Here are a couple examples:

> There are two people in your house, you both use two mugs a day, and you run the dishwasher once a day. You should have four mugs.
>
> If you run your dishwasher every three days because there are only two of you, then you likely need 2 x 2 x 3 = 12 mugs.

If you often have guests, add a few mugs and think about how many guests you normally have. Whether you have one couple or several couples staying with you makes a difference in how many you need.

Chances are, you will keep more than the calculation allows, but this is the best practice for decluttering.

If you have collector or sentimental mugs, really think about whether they need to be stored in the kitchen. Broken mugs can be repurposed into vases, makeup brush holders, and so on. The bottom line is you don't need 50 mugs for two people unless you consistently entertain a lot of coffee or tea drinkers!

Plastic bags

Yes, it's great to have a few on hand, but you don't need to keep every plastic bag you were ever given. Keep only a handful of that you know you will use in the next six months. Try to bring your own plastic or reusable bags when you shop. Minimizing your use of plastic bags helps the environment and cuts down on the clutter in your home.

Freezer items

The freezer is often where we put food that we will use later. From my experience, freezers can be the biggest clutter traps in any kitchen. Go through your freezer regularly, as I can guarantee some items already have the dreaded freezer burn and will have to be tossed. Annual freezer decluttering is a must, but I recommend doing it quarterly.

Utensils

Utensil decluttering depends on what you use. All I can suggest is that they are organized so they're within easy reach, as shown in Figure 5-3.

Image courtesy of author

FIGURE 5-3: Decluttered and organized utensils.

Pantries

If you have a big walk-in pantry, your friends are likely jealous. They won't be jealous, however, of how much longer it will take you to declutter. In my experience, pantries are clutter havens. Usually, they have high, deep shelves, are not properly lit, and are the perfect place to store clutter.

Do yourself a big favor and get extra lighting because this helps you see what you have in your pantry. Then trim down your pantry supplies, especially if you're keeping a lot of extra items such as plates, extra wine glasses for those parties you're going to have someday, or picnic supplies for the picnics you never seem to have time for.

A word on outdoor accessories: Reusable plastic wear is great for using outdoors, especially if you have a long summer season and use it regularly. Having multiple spares of plastic wear is probably unnecessary if you only use it sparingly or once a year. Also, take note of how much extra disposable outdoor cutlery and dishes you have that you are saving for the time you "might" go to the park or "might" have that cookout. These items are great to donate to local nonprofits, which are often in need of these supplies. As always, make sure you don't keep more than you need!

A word about kids and pantries. Before your kids dump their backpacks in your pantry, make sure they are emptied. It's best if they have a special hook for their backpack. Keep backpacks off the floor if possible, but not too high so kids can still access them when needed.

Getting rid of junk drawers forever

Many of you may already be thinking that is an impossible feat. I am not saying that you need to get rid of the drawer that you have in your kitchen for essential items that you grab on a weekly, monthly, or annual basis like scissors, tape, and the odd marker to make labels.

On the contrary, I suggest having a drawer like this! Yes, you heard me right! And in your drawer, you need to have blank labels and a marker so you can label and relabel your items as needed.

I want to go back to the word "junk drawer" because it has a bad rap, and rightfully so. Many of you probably remember reaching into your mom's junk drawer and finding buried treasures — Pokémon cards you thought you'd lost, that old McDonald's Happy Meal toy you got five years ago, or a pencil that needed sharpening. You probably also remember not being able to close those junk drawers, getting sticky fingers from rifling around in them, and worst of all, not actually finding what you needed! That is why I say get rid of junk drawers forever. And do not call your kitchen drawer with essentials a junk drawer. If you do, your kids, partners, friends, or even dog walkers will put junk in it. Tame the beast once and for all by renaming this drawer the "essentials drawer."

I converted my mom after she got rid of her junk drawer only to make the exact same one the following year. I had to label it "essentials drawer" and give her these tips:

- **Throw stuff away.** As with any other place in your home, declutter this drawer regularly!
- **Separate what is left.** If you have similar piles, decide on the best way to keep them separated. Get dividers, small bins, or plastic containers to help keep everything organized. Napkin rings work well for really small items, and dividers for the rest. The goal here is not to move items to another spot in your home. If an item does not go back in the essentials drawer, try to be diligent about donating or tossing it.
- **Evaluate it regularly.** Your household will be inclined to toss all their "junk" into this drawer, especially if they're used to it being a junk drawer. It is estimated that 80 percent of stuff in typical junk drawers is junk; hence, the name. Make sure once you change this drawer's purpose that you don't let junk back in. Keep this new drawer close to the trash so you can easily purge items.
- **Make it visible.** See-through drawers are not really a thing yet, but to get you started, or if junk starts to build up again, dump all the contents into a see-through container and leave it on your counter. Let your household know it will be in the trash shortly to encourage them to grab any items they want or need. Discard unclaimed items immediately.

» **Get rid of the physical drawer.** If all else fails, and you have tried everything but the junk drawer cannot be tamed, consider getting rid of it. Keep a see-through caddie or box on your counter or desk for your essential supplies — this way you'll constantly be staring at it as a reminder to declutter.

Figure 5-4 is a real-life example of my mother's drawer before and after decluttering. Once called the junk drawer, it's now been renamed the "essentials" drawer.

Image courtesy of author

FIGURE 5-4: From junk drawer to "essentials" drawer.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Busting through hidden clutter traps
- Optimizing furniture storage

Chapter 6
Decluttering Your Bedroom

If you have read this book in order, you've already gone through Chapter 3, which is devoted to your closet. I believe that any organizational plan starts with the closet because it's one of the first things you see in the morning.

However, another thing you see first thing in the morning — and the very last thing you see before you drift off into a hopefully peaceful sleep — is your bedroom. If you skipped the closet chapter, I suggest revisiting it before diving into this chapter because I focus only on bedroom items here.

Make sure you also apply the closet concepts to any dressers or chests of drawers that you have in your bedroom. Remember, you are likely wearing only 20 percent of clothes in your dresser and closet, so it's important to declutter anything that you have not worn in a year.

If you have books in your bedrooms, make sure you take a look at Chapter 9, which addresses book decluttering. If you happen to bring all your bathroom items into the bedroom, you may want to revisit Chapter 4 on bathroom decluttering.

In this chapter, I focus on the clutter most people have and use in the bedroom, but of course, there are many exceptions. You may have office items, exercise equipment, kids' toys, books, and many more types of items. You may be living in a studio apartment where you don't technically have walls, but don't let that stop you from decluttering what is immediately around your bed space.

Decluttering for Peaceful Sleep

Your bedroom should be a sanctuary or peaceful retreat. This space in your home is for sleep, relaxation, and maybe a few other adult activities, all of which are meant to take place in a peaceful setting.

Often, our bedrooms become grounds for laundry, unpacked bags, paperwork, and other miscellaneous items. One reason this happens is that the bedroom is usually tucked away behind a closed door, making it easier for clutter to accumulate. When guests come over unexpectedly, our bedrooms may be an easy place to stash clutter and close the door for later. Also, many of us bring work home or even work from home, which causes work stuff to seep into our bedrooms.

Whatever the reason clutter may have accumulated, you need to quickly deal with it because your bedroom is one of the most important rooms in your home. Your future sleep and health depend on it!

Banishing clutter from bedside tables

Anything you keep in your bedroom can affect your sleep. Clutter can prevent a good night's sleep; think about it, if your bedroom is littered with work items, you may have a difficult time shutting off your brain. The items that are in sight on your bedside table are especially important to declutter.

What is sitting on your bedside table can affect not only your sleep but also how you wake up. Waking up to reminders of uncompleted tasks or clutter causes immediate stress and leaves you feeling anxious the rest of the day.

Bedside tables can be excellent places to store essential items you use every day before bed, or they can turn into bedside junk drawers. My advice is to keep only essentials in them, or better yet, get tables with no drawers to prevent the latter from happening. Chances are, what you use every day, such as an alarm clock, lamp, book, glasses, and a bottle of water, will be on top of the table, so why do you need drawers, anyway?

TIP

If you want to keep using the drawers of your bedside table, stick to these tips to keep them decluttered:

- **Reading material:** A great way to end or start the day without the glare of screens! Have only the current book you're reading on this table and declutter the rest.
- **Tech gadgets and electronics:** These shouldn't be stored close to your bed because the light they emit can affect the quality of your sleep.
- **Other accessories and stuff:** I can't imagine what else you have in your bedside table, but go through it. Do you use it at least once a week while you're in the bedroom? If not, put the items where they belong.
- **Preventive measure:** Clean the drawer and put in a few books or another large item to stop anything else from going into the drawers. This will help keep your drawers clutter free.

Figure 6-1 shows an example of essentials on a bedside table. Without drawers, clutter has less of a chance to accumulate out of sight.

Considering hidden storage areas

I love unique space-saving storage solutions, especially for those who live in smaller quarters. I also suggest investing in quality storage systems or built-in systems if you can, so you don't have to have boxes or bins in your home permanently.

The bedroom can offer lots of unique storage solutions, but these can be clutter traps if they are not treated properly and evaluated consistently. Firstly, ensure that everything is placed away neatly. When you know what you have, you'll be less inclined to

add unnecessary items or keep collections that have little or no use. Then, watch out for these common bedroom storage areas:

- **Under the bed:** Always check under your bed for monsters and clutter; that's my motto. Today's modern platform beds don't have an "under the bed," which helps prevent dust and clutter buildup! I highly recommend this type of bed. However, some clever companies have invented storage by lifting up the mattress for hidden items. Check this place quarterly if you use if it for storage. Some beds also offer built-in drawers, which is genius for storage, but the same decluttering rules apply!
- **Headboard storage:** Some headboards offer built-in or add-in storage solutions. Be wary of the clutter that can accumulate here, and only keep what you need to reach for while in bed.

Cheryl Winn-Boujnida / Unsplash

FIGURE 6-1: Decluttered beside table.

- **Storage benches:** I love a good bench for sitting down and being able to tie my shoes. Today, they offer sneaky storage solutions, and they come in a variety of colors and designs, many of which can match your bedroom furniture and be placed at the foot of your bed.
- **Behind doors:** There are lots of over-the-door organizers for shoes, jewelry, or any other accessory you feel would fit in its place. This is a great storage idea, but make sure that when you close your bedroom door, nothing you're looking at is clutter. Evaluate this extensively.
- **Baskets, boxes, and bins:** These are great items that can provide extra storage if needed — and *only* if needed! Go through the items in these boxes and determine whether you actually need and use their contents.

Cutting clutter from corners

You may think this is an odd heading as every room or space in your house has a corner! For some reason, the bedroom corners seem to accumulate clutter like no other. It would be unusual to toss your laundry in the corner of your kitchen, but in your bedroom, it could be normal practice. I want you to examine the corners of your bedroom and remove the clutter. Please, stop using your bedroom corners for clutter from this day forward!

After the clutter is removed from your bedroom, corners can actually be reevaluated because they can offer additional storage or seating areas in your bedroom. Again, for selected items, not clutter! Corners in your bedroom can be great for hanging corner clothing racks if you don't have a closet or enough closet space. They can also be a great place to hang your outfits for the next day so you are prepared and organized.

Detoxing the digital zone

I know you've heard that your bedroom should be free of tech gadgets, especially your phone. And if you're like me, you have ignored this advice many times over and still do. I admit, I always think I have to have my phone beside me just in case. However, because of our constant need to be connected, this has now turned our bedroom into a stressful place. What's worse is that the bright screens affect our quality of sleep.

One study done by Harvard Researchers breaks down the detrimental effects from having your phone in your room. Here's how it impacts your sleep:

- It takes you longer to fall asleep. End of story.
- It messes with your natural sleeping rhythm, which can affect everything from appetite to stress levels to the likelihood of getting a disease!
- You feel more tired and your alertness is reduced.

I hope these reasons provide a bit more motivation to think about keeping your phone out of the bedroom overnight.

Furnishing for the Win

Now that we have identified a few reasons to clear the clutter, it's time to talk about a few other items and habits that are important to keep the restful bedroom setting going. The more functional your furniture is, and the better organized it is for your lifestyle, the less likely clutter is to build up. I'm not suggesting you go buy all new furniture, but ensure that your next purchases are well thought out and fit your space, needs, and functionality.

Your bed

Your bed should take up the most space in your bedroom. It should be the piece of furniture that you have paid the most attention to when selecting, and it should have lots of space and not be cluttered with items beneath, on top of, or generally around the bed. Make your bed the most important piece of furniture in your bedroom and spend time finding the right bed and mattress for your bedroom's size and design, your preference, and your storage needs. Investing in a quality bed will likely last decades. As always, the simpler the better!

What goes on your bed is just as important. As you can imagine, I try to keep it simple. A bed with 20 pillows you have to remove before you even crawl in is a bit too cluttered for my taste.

TIP

Make your bed every morning! Although an obvious life lesson, which you may have learned during your upbringing, making your bed every morning sets the tone for your entire day. The idea is that you've already accomplished something once you have made your bed. Plus, it makes your bedroom look less cluttered. And your bed is the best, largest surface for helping you fold and organize other things. Make this a habit as you do with daily decluttering.

Essentials

Determine what the essentials are in your bedroom. I encourage keeping the bare minimum of items in most spaces, especially the bedroom. It is important in the bedroom to ask yourself what you need, and whether it's conducive to ensuring you get a restful night's sleep.

Here are the bedroom essentials:

- Bed
- Sheets
- A few surfaces to put some lamps on

You probably have many more items of furniture than this in your bedroom, and I encourage you to review each item of furniture that is taking valuable real estate in your sleeping haven. Really review furniture items because furniture can also be clutter. We usually hang onto bedroom furniture because it came as part of a set or because we are conditioned to think we need to have those bedside tables and dresser. However, if you don't use them, they are clutter.

Encouraging Your Sleeping Partner

After reading this, you may have some ideas that you want to put into action right away regarding how to make your bedroom a clutter-free sleeping sanctuary. You may be sharing your bedroom and your home with other people or even pets. It is important to involve them in your decluttering process and share your new ideas so you can collaborate and enjoy the sleeping benefits as a household.

Here are a few things to remember as you share your decluttering goals with your household:

- **Be respectful.** With shared spaces, it's important to discuss and share ideas because one person's clutter may be someone else's important paperwork or creative project.
- **Explain the discomfort clutter is causing.** Be specific about the detrimental effects of having a cluttered bedroom and the potential benefits of having a clutter-free environment.
- **Negotiate.** It can take time for mindsets to change, and you may have to change your own first. Being patient and sticking to what you believe will help make your bedroom a more restful sleep area. It will take time, especially to adopt the technology-free ideals into the bedroom. I'll be frank — I sometimes still keep my phone and laptop in my bed. It takes time to change habits, and you and I both need to be patient!
- **Keep clutter styles in mind.** In Chapter 1, I discuss clutter personalities, and it's important to keep in mind your own style as well as that of the person you share your bedroom with. Clutter may be difficult to part with for your partner, so be gentle and kind when discussing these items.
- **Designate a clutter-free zone.** The best-case scenario would be to make your entire home, office, and mind clutter-free zones! However, that may not happen overnight (or ever). The bedroom can be one of those places you designate as a clutter-free zone and stick to for all the reasons mentioned in this chapter.
- **Make it easy.** I mention keeping "declutter boxes" in your home. If you get aesthetically pleasing baskets or boxes that can remain permanently in your home to ensure decluttering is top of mind, that will ease the process.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Sorting your linens and assessing your needs
- Ensuring maximum efficiency in your laundry room
- Making the most of mudrooms and entryways

Chapter 7
Decluttering Linens and Laundry Areas

Next to the closet chapter, this is probably one of my favorite decluttering topics because I find linen decluttering extra fun. Stacked linens can look wonderful, and we spend so much of our time sleeping that we should take care of what we are actually sleeping on. If you read Chapter 6 on bedroom decluttering, you know I am serious about getting a good night's sleep, and I believe linens play a big part in this. I don't give you advice on what type of linens you should buy because that is an individual preference, but I hope to inspire you to simplify your linens and find what really works for your style and sleep!

Having a linen closet is ideal, but don't worry if you don't have one. I give some practical ideas on storage solutions. Whatever your linen storage situation, decluttering is a must, and a few quick tips should keep your linens fresh and ready for you or your next guest to use.

AUTHOR SAYS

I had trouble figuring out what to call a laundry room these days. You may not store your linens remotely close to your laundry facilities; however, I still ended up bundling linens and laundry in this chapter and tried to organize it efficiently to make the most

sense. If you live in a condo or apartment, perhaps your laundry machines are not in a physical room but in a closet or in your bathroom. Or maybe you have a huge entryway room you call a "mudroom" where you also have your laundry facilities as well as an entire host of other items. When I refer to various laundry areas, keep in mind your specific situation. I try to give general tips. Some may not apply to you if you don't have a larger laundry area, but they may help you in decluttering your entryway even if they are not necessarily in the same spot.

Decluttering Your Linens

When I refer to linens, I mean anything that goes on your bed. This obviously includes sheets and pillow cases, but I also talk about pillows, comforters, and duvet covers and briefly mention bed skirts even though I don't like these myself (it is a personal preference). You might keep your towels in your linen closet as well, and that is great, especially if you have a larger closet or smaller bathroom storage space. If you want more information on towel decluttering, refer to Chapter 4 (bathroom) and Chapter 5 (kitchen).

The importance of linens should not be underestimated. A good night's sleep can cure most things, and sheets can help with that. I don't go into details about what thread counts to look for, what fabrics you should buy, and so on — I am a decluttering expert, not a linen expert. In this chapter, I help you declutter and fold linens no matter what thread count they are.

I encourage you to gather up all your linens if they're not already in one place and go through them all while reading this chapter. The great news is linen decluttering should be one of the faster decluttering projects. And usually you are not as attached to linens as clothes or other items, so getting rid of them is a much smoother process.

Determining your needs

As with most of my advice, always start with what you need. One of the biggest reasons we don't get rid of linens is usually because they are still usable. Those old comforters you have from your college days are still in good shape even though you don't use

them anymore. Or, those fitted sheets are slightly worn, but you keep them "just in case" you need them someday. The biggest culprit is when you discard the fitted sheet but keep the other parts of the set, and never end up using them again because it's not a complete set! There are many reasons that linen clutter builds up, but whatever the reason, there are few ways to determine what you need.

To determine your needs, first consider how many family members you have in your house. This should help you get more clear on your current needs. Each bed should have two or three sets if you don't do laundry that frequently. How many guest beds you have and how frequently you do laundry will help you determine whether you need one or two sets of linens for those beds. This is usually plenty, unless you have a serious revolving door of guests, in which case you likely need more sets.

Some people have summer and winter sheets that get changed seasonally. That is okay, even though you may be doubling the number of sheets you own. Again, limit the quantity to what you use and make it realistic for your lifestyle.

What do you need for each of the sets? That's a matter of individual preference because some people like multiple flat sheets, comforters, or pillows.

For myself, I keep it as minimal as possible and stick to a fitted sheet, duvet cover, and two matching pillowcases. Not having a flat sheet may be the European way, but using a duvet rather than a comforter means you can wash the covers weekly.

WARNING

Emergencies and accidents do happen when it comes to sheets. If you have kids, maybe you need a few more spares. Mattress pads can also do wonders for protecting your mattresses because you probably don't have many spare mattresses lying around, nor do you want to. Having a few extra linens is a great idea to mitigate accidents and emergencies.

Whatever your sheet set preference, ask yourself these questions as you go through your linens:

- **Are they worn out, frayed, or stained, or do they have any holes?**

- **Do they fit the beds I currently have?** Don't keep things because you might get a bigger bed or downsize in the future. Only keep what you currently need.
- **Are any parts of the set missing?** What was once your favorite sheet set may now be missing a pillowcase and a fitted sheet. So why keep the remaining items if you don't use them?
- **Do I like the way they feel?** Maybe the linens are itchy, not warm enough, too warm, or too wrinkly.
- **Do I like the way they look?** If they don't match your bedroom theme or décor, donate them or give them away because they probably match someone else's.
- **Do I have too many?** See the preceding advice to better determine how many you need.

Theming your linens

Linens often become cluttered because you don't have a specific décor or a set theme. I try to be as minimalist as possible with linens. Mine are all white, usually the same brand, and I stick to a fitted sheet, a duvet cover, and matching pillowcases. I don't use a flat sheet, but it's okay if you do.

Clutter starts to creep up when you add décor colors, bed skirts, varying comforters, accent pillows, random top sheets, and so on. I challenge you to try to keep it as simple as possible. I'm not saying you have to be as boring as me with my white linens, but stick to a theme for each room. This way the clutter won't build up in the first place.

TIP

I love labeling everything, linens included. This also helps me to stay decluttered. If I have to make new linen labels every month, chances are I am buying too many. I label my sheets by brand and size. For example, if the sheet set is a queen from Frétte, I would label it like this. You also might want to label them by room or theme. For me, it is important to have the size on them because the last thing I want to do is have to open a perfectly folded fitted sheet to see if it fits a queen or a king bed. More on how to fold those pesky fitted sheets coming up. My labeled, themed linens in Figure 7-1 show what I have done for years.

Image courtesy of author

FIGURE 7-1: Linens labeled by theme.

Timing your linens

In this case, timing doesn't refer to how long it takes you to fold a fitted sheet or make your bed, but rather how long you keep your linens, pillows, and comforters.

Much of this depends on wear and how much they are used, but here are some general guidelines:

- **Sheets:** There is no set guideline because it depends on usage and how often they are washed. Stick to the tips in the preceding section to check for wear, frays, and stains indicating it's time to replace them.
- **Pillows:** Generally, with daily use you should replace feather, down, and synthetic-filled pillows every 18 months; memory foam can last up to three years. Remember to also wash your pillows and follow the manufacturer's recommendations on this.
- **Comforters:** Martha Stewart suggests that they can last for up to 25 years if you keep them covered when not in use and regularly air them. Obviously, replace comforters if they begin to look limp, flat, or start falling apart. Again, follow the manufacturer's recommendations for cleaning.

- **Duvets:** Duvets should last longer than your pillows before they need to be replaced. The sleep council suggests most duvets can last five years and really good quality ones double that. There is no exact science to when you should replace yours, but similar to my other advice, if it is falling apart or getting lumpy, chances are you may need to think about getting a new one.

Folding your linens

Now that you have determined your needs, decluttered and maybe even themed your linens, it's time for the exciting part of folding them. I try in this book to mostly focus on decluttering, but I think it is important to add this section because linen folding helps keep your decluttering sustainable because you can see exactly what you have. Everyone who knows me knows that my fitted sheets are always folded perfectly.

TIP

My mom is still amazed by the technique I taught her for folding fitted sheets — and you can see the video on my YouTube channel. Look for "Folding a Fitted Sheet in Under 1 Minute (WITH MY MOM AS A GUEST)." You can go directly to my YouTube channel or under Jane Stoller or access it through my website organized-jane.com.

My short lesson:

1. **Place your hands in each of the corners, and place one corner inside the other.**
2. **Lay the sheet flat and perform the same action on the other side.**
3. **Now you'll have a rectangle shape that you can neatly fold into thirds, and then double over once or twice for the perfect fold.**

If you have a laundry room with a huge folding table, this is an ideal place to fold fitted sheets. Few of us, however, likely have a laundry room that large. I usually fold my fitted sheets on top of my bed because it's the perfect size. Alternatively, folding fitted sheets with two people is even easier. You each can grab two corners in your hands and meet in the middle. This can make fitted sheet folding fun, especially if you have kids in your home. Figure 7-2 shows what properly folded fitted sheet corners should look like.

Image courtesy of author

FIGURE 7-2: A folded fitted sheet corner.

The rest of your sheets should be a breeze after folding your fitted sheets. Flat and duvets can be folded in thirds or doubles, and if you can fold them with someone just like fitted sheets, it makes the process easier.

Removing unneeded pieces

Now that you have a pile of linens that no longer belongs in your linen closet, you may be wondering what to do with them. As with most of my advice, get the decluttered items out of your space as quickly as possible. The longer your clutter lingers, the greater the chances it won't leave. If your linens are in good shape, consider donating them to one of the following options:

- **Car enthusiasts:** If your linens are in good shape, car enthusiasts love to use old linens as rags.
- **Painters:** Old linens are useful for painters who need to cover furniture and floors.
- **Animal shelters:** Donating your linens is a great way to help out rescue animals.

- **College kids:** Anyone setting up a new apartment during college years usually welcomes linens.
- **Homeless shelters:** These are often a much-needed, welcome addition to their donation supplies.

I have never donated sheets to or bought them from a thrift store, but donating them may be an option as well if the preceding options don't seem like a good fit.

Decluttering Your Laundry Room

Maybe you don't have an entire room for laundry, but chances are whatever area you store your laundry in has clutter. Where you keep your washer and dryer is less of a concern than what surrounds it. It's truly amazing how quickly stuff can accumulate on top of, below, behind, and in all the nooks and crannies around the washer and dryer. Instead of storing laundry items on top of your washer and dryer, store them on a shelf, in a caddy, or in a basket. If items are stacked too high, are difficult to reach, or even keep you from opening the washer, you need to reevaluate your current system.

With laundry rooms, the key is to dive in and get started because it usually involves less strategizing, inventory taking, or thinking compared to other areas of your home. The first step is to take a look around your washer and dryer and remove immediate clutter, lint, and dirt that has accumulated. Remove clothes that are clean, put them away, and wash ones that need to be washed. I bet you have already decluttered ten things without even thinking about it! Now the real fun can start.

Categorizing items

You may still have clutter around your laundry area even after your quick ten-item decluttering, so it's time to organize everything properly. This starts by following the usual decluttering principle: If you don't need it, get rid of it. Going a bit further, I encourage you to put items into categories similar to those that follow:

- **Laundry items:** Generally, anything related to doing laundry is considered a laundry item. This includes detergents, lint

removers, fabric softeners, clothespins, and so on. If you find a stain stick from 2008 that has yet to be opened, it's safe to say it should go. Or if that spray has never been used in ten years why do you suddenly think you need it now? Get rid of anything you don't use or need.

- **Cleaning supplies:** If these are stored in your laundry room, go through them and take note of what you have.
- **Outdoor stuff:** If your laundry is located closest to your entranceway, it is amazing what can accumulate. Be mindful of this clutter trap.
- **Other miscellaneous items:** Anything else that has seeped into your laundry space should be evaluated. Determine how and why it is here, and what you can do to declutter it.

Don't forget to find proper homes for everything other than your laundry staples, which we work on next.

Organizing by cleaner type

If you have one detergent for all your clothes, skip this section — you're already decluttered!

If you have a detergent for cold water, whites, delicates, colors, and so forth, then start planning how to best organize these. If you lack space, you may want to consider multipurpose detergents or find smaller bottles or sizes. If those are not options, then you will have to make do with your space and add shelves, hanging baskets, cubbies, or racks. The key is that nothing should be directly on top of a washer and dryer, nor should anything be laying haphazardly on the floor.

I suggest also decluttering by frequency of use. If you continually reach for your all-purpose laundry detergent and only use your delicate wash monthly, place these items accordingly due to usage.

Creating a sustainable system

You likely have some sort of laundry schedule or routine. Maybe you do laundry every Sunday or Wednesday evening, or every day because you have five kids. You have likely formed a habit of some sort because laundry is a task that never goes away and is

a constant in our lives, whether we like it or not. Create a similar system for the items you keep around the laundry room.

The biggest and most obvious tip that is posted on every laundry room Pinterest board is to have labeled baskets for colors, whites, and whatever else is a big washing topic in your house. This saves you time and forces others in the same house to follow suit when sorting laundry.

Other things that are helpful when creating systems are to have your space prepared in the most efficient way possible. I am *not* telling you to get more clutter; however, some items that are helpful for creating a laundry system can include:

- Labeled laundry bags or bins
- Drying racks
- Hanging racks
- Laundry baskets
- Large see-through containers for clothespins and laundry detergent
- Hooks
- Ironing boards
- Irons
- Baskets
- Folding tables

AUTHOR SAYS

One of the keys to enjoying the never-ending task of laundry is to try to make the space and process as fun and efficient as possible. With the right tools, you can add hooks, labels, and jars for your items that make your space more visually appealing. Most people, maybe you included, don't like ironing. I love it and love ironed clothes, sheets, tea towels, you name it! However, I don't like wasting time fiddling with the ironing board. Having it handy makes all the difference for my time and my appearance. I say wrinkles have never been in style and never will be! Figure 7-3 provides a small space-saving way to store your ironing board.

REMEMBER

Make your laundry system so efficient that it becomes routine and maybe even fun somehow.

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FIGURE 7-3: Space-saving ironing board.

Determining efficient storage

Today our laundry rooms have become too full with stuff. All you need is a washer and dryer and some detergent. It's even possible to use household supplies to make your own detergent if you're really against chemicals.

If you have a large laundry room, make it as efficient as possible with folding tables, a stable ironing board, and the best cleaning supplies with labeled caddies.

For smaller spaces, see what you can do to use the space most efficiently by installing shelves or hanging baskets. You can use corner shelves, hooks, and over-the-door hanging storage to store items such as detergent, lint removers, fabric softener, clothespins, and so on.

REMEMBER

Whatever your solution, remember the basics of decluttering and don't get carried away with so much storage and then declutter and realize you have nothing to store (even though this rarely happens).

Washing using the "less is more" mentality

Make sure that what you are washing is actually dirty. Do your bath towels need to be washed every time you use them? Likely

not. Jeans and sweaters only need to be washed after multiple wears. Your sheets and other towels will depend on their frequency of use and the activities they're used for.

Be mindful of what you're washing to preserve the environment, your clothes, and the decluttered atmosphere in your laundry room.

Mudrooms and Entryways

The entry from the outside world into your home is where a lot of clutter can build up. Large and small houses always seem to have clutter problems upon directly entering the home because, let's face it, coming home tired after a long day of work or activities makes it easy to drop your stuff, and it can easily be forgotten or placed in the wrong spot.

Here are my top tips for decluttering mudrooms and entryways:

- **Clear the clutter regularly.** This point may seem redundant, but when I say regularly, I mean daily. From mail to broken items to trash to books to trinkets, it all enters here, so stop it from staying by being consistent in your decluttering efforts.
- **Be mindful of floor safety.** Get the right mats and flooring to protect your floors from dirt and moisture before they enter your house.
- **Designate zones for individuals.** Give everyone a dedicated spot and don't let them exceed this precious real estate with their items.
- **Get creative.** Use baskets or bins and decorate and label them. Use stickers or signs, and keep a declutter box on standby so items can be tossed in this box immediately upon arrival into your home.

The items in this spot in your house should be the easiest to put away quickly, and this area should be the most tailored to the individual so hanging up that backpack or putting the paperwork in a dedicated spot is a no-brainer.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Changing habits based on societal norms
- Encouraging family involvement and donating for the win
- Looking at the best ways to store toys

Chapter 8
Decluttering Your Kids' Areas

Some people have an easy time decluttering their kids' stuff. Their kids outgrow their clothes, books, toys, or gadgets, and they toss or donate them depending on their condition. For others, the mere thought of giving away the sock that your child once wore is craziness! Plus, many parents often think about the what-ifs, such as what if they have more kids or their grandkids can wear and use the items someday. Both of these examples relate back to Chapter 1 where I ask you to determine your clutterbug style. However, there is even more justification for keeping your kids' items than there is for your own, which makes this a very challenging and sometimes emotional topic.

I am not going to tell you what you need to declutter in terms of "stuff," but this chapter can help you hone in on your decluttering mindset, as well as that of your kids. This process helps you both become more comfortable with decluttering and helps to shape your children's minds and influence them positively when it comes to clutter.

I also dive into the reasons why kids have so much stuff in the first place. If you're reading this and thinking that when you were five, you didn't have nearly the amount of stuff as your child does,

you're probably right. Clever marketing tactics and technology have made our kids more aware of what is actually available to them. Last time I checked, 5-year-olds don't shop online or have the means to pay for items yet, so their guardians and other loved ones are responsible for all the "stuff" that works its way into their rooms in the first place. This stuff actually comes from all angles for kids. From family members at every occasion offering presents, to McDonald's Happy Meal toys, dentists' offices, and Halloween goody bags, which seem to be getting filled with more than only candy, kids are consuming more than ever. Our consumerist society emphasizes the normalcy of presents for most holidays, which gives retailers the opportunity to sell more and more.

Of course, not buying things in the first place can be an easy solution, but I know this is easier said than done with all the external influences affecting kids today. Therefore, I am truly trying to change kids' mindsets first instead of tackling this huge societal issue.

AUTHOR SAYS

Because I don't have kids at the time of writing this book, I decided to do the next best thing to help me write this chapter. Many of my clients have families, and I have learned from them about kids decluttering. Plus, I have many friends with kids whom I asked for advice. I was overwhelmed with the response, and surprisingly, everyone had the same tips, which were to declutter consistently and get everyone on board! Everyone was supportive and agreed that something had to be done to change not only the ways clutter gets into the home but also the entire mindset around decluttering. Therefore, you don't have to take my advice but the advice of countless mothers and fathers who wish their kids would have and get less stuff.

Changing Your Kids' Decluttering Mindset

I want to establish that it may not be only you or your child's fault that they have too much stuff. Together, you and I can stop this from recurring and causing future clutter challenges for kids. Don't send your kids to clutter camp just yet because there may be a few tricks we can work on together to help change not only your mindset but also societal norms, which are the largest influence on what comes into your home.

Why so much stuff?

I don't want to keep nagging on this point that back in the day kids didn't have that much stuff. But it is true — for them, and for us as well! However, now that we're aware of our consumerism habits, we have the opportunity to do something about them.

You may always be trying to keep up with your friends', family's, and even neighbors' purchasing habits. Plus, your kids are likely confronted with mass amounts of marketing and see the stuff their friends have, which makes them more inclined to accumulate more clutter.

You still need to instill the values of decluttering even if poor Sally and Tommy don't realize they are on the verge of becoming clutterbugs.

WARNING

Not only does trying to keep up with consumerism lead to overconsumption, but it's also damaging to the environment. Even if we toss items eventually, they still had to be produced and shipped, only to end up in a landfill. And don't even get me started on gift giving. Do you give gifts because you are generous or because you are conditioned to give in to the material demands and wants of society?

The following sections offer a few ways you can change your kids' decluttering mindset.

Leading by example

The *Washington Post* ran an article about why kids have so much stuff and how to deal with it. One of its suggestions was to lead by example, giving the example of not handing out plastic goody bags at birthday parties. At first when I read this, I thought, "OMG no, kids love the goody bags." But then I kept reading and asked myself if they really do love them, or if they only love them for five minutes until they are on to the next thing. The article went on to say that parents don't like them because then they have to take them home, or worse, if it's their kid's birthday party, they have to find the sub-par junk to put in them.

REMEMBER

Leading by example starts with the people kids are surrounded by most — not only parents but other relatives and friends who play an important part in shaping the amount of stuff that enters kids' brains and physical spaces.

It may take some tough conversations with your family and friends because, let's face it, most of us like giving more than receiving, and there is nothing like seeing a kid's face light up when opening a present.

TIP

Offer experiences or quality time instead of physical items, or pool funds to give one present instead of five. Events, activities, creative dates, and whatever other ideas you and your team around your kids can come up with will probably end up being more memorable to your kids in the long run, anyway. I remember playing cards with my grandmother for hours, but I can't remember what she got me for Christmas in 1995.

Sustainability also comes into play here. If your kids see you bring your own reusable grocery bag to the store, they will think this is normal. I grew up recycling, and I couldn't physically throw out a can or glass jar without thinking it was bad or that on some level I would get in trouble. Those values were instilled in me from an early age and have become part of my normal way of life, like brushing my teeth; I just do it.

If you can show your kids how you donate or repurpose items, they will think that is the norm. Try scheduling monthly donation dropoffs and bring your kids along. Getting other moms to jump on board can help you stay consistent and make it more fun. Trust me, there are lots of other parents who wish someone with less stuff would help them set an example.

You also need to keep in mind who else is leading your kids, such as teachers, nannies, friends, and grandparents. If someone spends a significant amount of time with your children, that person can also teach your child about opportunities related to decluttering. Let these folks understand the way you and your family feel toward clutter and encourage this mindset. You will be surprised by how many people want to help with this quest and will be excited to join the mission.

Making decluttering fun

Kids and adults like to do things that are fun. For kids, the fun factor is even more important because they have a shorter attention span and less discipline to stay on track when given tasks.

Making decluttering fun is the single best way to get your kids involved. You want to help them equate donating and decluttering with having fun, rather than considering it an annoying or stressful task. This single change in mindset can be the way to create more ease and sustainability around getting rid of excess stuff.

I got my niece and nephew into decluttering at a young age because I loved sharing my organizing and decluttering advice. Surprisingly, they seemed to always listen. When my niece was 8, we got together and made her own donation boxes, which she decorated and kept in her room. It was a fun activity and made the decluttering process fun, plus she always remembered the activity and why we did it. My nephew has monthly decluttering challenges with his family and goes around on his hoverboard with labeled bins collecting items.

Teaching that decluttering is a priority

A few years ago, I read a blog about a challenge to only have 20 toys. As soon as your child reaches the 20 mark, he should evaluate them and donate what is no longer needed. Therefore, he will only ever have 20 toys, which means he is likely to play with one for more than five minutes before moving on to the next. This may seem daunting, and to be honest, I have never known anyone to implement this rule successfully, but I have known parents who have dedicated bins for toys that, once full, signal that no more toys are allowed. Both of these examples offer kids a valuable lesson in not only decluttering but also valuing and using what they do have and donating the rest.

Again, remember that parents are not the only ones teaching kids these days. Be mindful to ensure everyone around your kids is aware of your decluttering goals to help create a sustainable system.

TIP

Here are a few more tips to help you:

- **Immediately put anything broken in the trash if it can't be repurposed.** Get rid of what is now useless and clear precious real estate in your kids' spaces.
- **Find a new home for anything that hasn't been played with in the last month.** This will help your kids value what they have and be more mindful with what they use.

- **Give experiences.** I mention this earlier — activities and experiences are a big hit!
- **Store some toys for later.** With the number of toys that kids have these days, they can be overwhelmed with what to play with. Storing some and taking them out every few months allows your kids to focus on what they have for the moment and really use it. Then when they are done, they can donate it and play with the other toys that were stored.
- **Make homemade gifts and costumes.** Encourage your kids to make their gifts for others. And when plays and Halloween roll around, making costumes can ignite creativity in your kids and also help keep the clutter down!

Creating donation challenges

I could have easily made this a bullet point rather than a section, but I feel very strongly that the earlier we are taught the joy of giving and helping others, the better our communities and the entire world will be. As an only child, my parents tried very early to teach me the values of sharing and giving, and they have stayed with me. I also received many great tips from parents about this topic — following are my favorite ideas:

- **Being charitable with allowance money:** When kids get their allowance, consider setting up not only a money jar for saving and spending on the stuff they want, but another one for giving. Help your kids identify which charity or cause they can give this money to in order to instill a giving mindset.
- **Giving away an item before holidays:** Before holidays, encourage your kids to give away something they own before they receive a new gift. This can become a family tradition.
- **Instituting a no-gift rule at birthday parties:** This tip was given to me by my nephew. He told all of his friends instead of a gift he would like everyone to bring ten dollars. He then donated that money to the local school for updated sports equipment. This is a super idea, and the donation can be anything that your child and her group of friends are passionate about.

- **Creating challenges/games:** Give your kids a point when they donate a certain amount of stuff, or perhaps set a monthly challenge to donate five items to their selected donation spot.
- **Taking advantage of libraries:** Get your kids to use libraries! Libraries are a great way to get kids to read books and then return them when they are done. And many libraries offer more than just books. Your kids can borrow from the library's DVD and CD collections, which also can minimize the media clutter.
- **Conducting thrift store challenges:** Instead of always buying new, some parents are encouraging kids to find items at local thrift stores to understand that "new" isn't always necessary.

These are just a few ideas, and I'm sure you have lots more. Focus on making donating and its benefits top of mind.

Repurposing toys and clothes

Repurposing can be more than fun for kids; it can be a serious life lesson. We are so used to going on Amazon when we need or want something, and we usually get it brand spanking new.

However, wouldn't it be great if our first thought was, "Can we make this instead? Or do we have something similar to use?" When I was a kid, I thought like this and was uber creative. It was in large part because I grew up in a rural area of Canada where going to a shopping mall required a 60-minute drive. And that was before online shopping — the Sears catalog was all we had, and it took forever to get items delivered.

In came creativity. I would paint, bedazzle, glue, and fix anything I needed and had some genius creations. One of them I still use in my bathroom entailed painting flower pots for my makeup brushes. I even made some of my own clothes — jeans to jean shorts, dresses to scarves — and I fixed holes in my socks. I was resourceful then, and I still am today. We should first try to repurpose before we buy new, not just for our wallets but for the environment, society, and to be a good role model.

Here are some tangible examples of what you can repurpose for kids. And if you search this topic online, you will get hundreds more. You can even ask your kids to come up with the ideas! Here are three to get your creative juices flowing:

- **Sock puppets:** Yes, it is still fun to repurpose socks into puppets.
- **Planters as toys:** Help your kids discover how to grow things, from flowers to food.
- **Dinosaur toothbrush holders:** Any toy can be used for this — it is genius and can also be used for pencils, paintbrushes, and so on.

For more inspiration, check out `www.architectureartdesigns.com/30-fun-diy-repurposed-toys-ideas/`.

The key is to get your kids excited to reuse their existing items. This skill will not only enhance their creativity but will also make them more resourceful in all aspects of their life.

Hand-me-downs that never leave

Some kids only get hand-me-downs, while others have never experienced what gently used clothing is. This largely depends on family size, proximity to thrift shops, or the willingness of friends to give away their kids' old clothes.

REMEMBER

Hand-me-downs need to be decluttered as efficiently as possible. Often they don't fit, or we take them just to be nice. Many parents I talked to said they were given bins of hand-me-downs they don't need that are now taking up space! It's okay to say "no" to hand-me-downs if you won't use them.

Also, get rid of the ones that are too worn or used. They may be okay to donate or hand down again if there's a bit of life left in them, or they may be fit for use as rags or other repurposing before they are eventually tossed.

REMEMBER

You don't have to keep everything that you were given or that was donated to you. Just because someone gives you her clutter doesn't mean it has to turn into your clutter. This goes for anything — not just kids' stuff.

Storing Toys Efficiently

A big part of decluttering is organizing what is left. This is an important step for kids so they can begin developing this habit early. Often kids have more different kinds of things than adults do. They usually have tons of crafts, which should be kept together so your children can see what they have, and also so they can get creative and repurpose items. Kids also usually have lots of different types of books, from coloring to picture to reference books depending on their age. These should also be sorted — magazine racks can do wonders!

Most kids usually have too many stuffed animals. And when I asked parents what their biggest kids decluttering challenge is, they usually say stuffed animals and clothes! Find a way for your kids to organize their stuffed animals so they can see what they have. If they have hampers or baskets overfilled with stuffed animals, they're likely to forget what's on the bottom.

Many kids also have excess costumes — but how many do they really need? Can you borrow and rent costumes instead of always buying new ones? A tickle trunk for dress-up is always fun, and of course, I don't want to limit any creativity or future actors/actresses in the making. But if they don't use the items in the trunk, there is likely another kid who would be excited to use them.

Organizing by optimal height

I always hung up my jacket when I came home from school as a kid, and I still do today! In my house there was no way around this. My coat had the same spot in our entranceway, and I got to decide where my coat went and what it would hang on. I painted the hooks, and my parents hung the hooks right at my eye level. My mom loves hooks, and for kids they are lifesavers. I remember these hooks fondly, and I remember using them every day for my backpacks and many jackets — living in Canada, you needed lots of different jackets.

Hanging stuff on hooks that your kids can reach and also enjoy using makes a huge difference. The stuff that is hung on hooks should be used constantly. Once it stays on the hook for longer than weeks or months — it should never get to a year — it's probably best to declutter and make room for items that need those hooks.

Organizing by labels and favorite colors

Certain colors make people happy. I spent a significant amount of time learning about different colors when I was designing my brand. Colors can affect our behaviors in many ways, and they affect our kids' behaviors too. Colors have the ability to soothe, inspire, excite, and even heal in some cases, so working them into kids' spaces is important. You can research various colors' properties and work these into your children's playrooms and bedrooms.

To get your kids more involved and excited about decluttering, ensure that your their "declutter" boxes are labeled and in their favorite colors or decorated with their favorite superheroes or pictures that they associate with donating. If your kids like these boxes, it will increase their chances of using them. Plus, if your kids have dedicated spots and boxes for their items with a limit such as a lid, this encourages decluttering. These spaces can also be decorated by your kids or with their chosen theme to encourage organizing. Figure 8-1 shows an example of these decorated boxes.

Sentimental items

It can be hard to say goodbye to your kids' items, and rightly so because they grow up so fast. If there is something that you truly want to keep, treat it like your other sentimental items and put it in a labeled box. Also, be mindful of things that you think your kids will want. They probably won't reuse their old clothes and the like. I can't tell you what is sentimental because that's different for everyone. My mom kept one of the dresses I wore all the time that she made, and I still have it today and keep it with my sentimental items. Everyone's definition of sentimental is different!

Involving your kids

Most of this chapter reflects the reasoning behind getting your kids involved — not only involved in the process but setting up the systems because this will ensure that habits form and can transform into adulthood.

Involving your kids early around the idea of giving can go a lot further toward helping them than giving them more toys and games than they can ever play with.

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FIGURE 8-1: Kids' labeled box and easy-to-reach stuffed animals.

Young children can donate their gently used items and see reactions and understand the benefits to others. As parents, we can explain the benefits of how their donations will be used to help other people.

As children get older, the focus can shift from donating stuff to also volunteering their time. From food shelters, tutoring, elderly home visits, or whatever is available within their community, decide as a family where to volunteer. This can become a meaningful experience that sticks with your kids for life. Your children may have new ideas of where time and donations should be spent, and it's important to allow them to contribute because it is also their community and the future of their planet.

Sustainability

As your children get older, their organizing and decluttering habits also should evolve. The more you stay on top of this, the more

likely they are to continue to declutter throughout their entire lives. Some final last words to help keep decluttering top of mind now and as your children grow into adults:

- **Teach them to clean.** They need to know how, so don't always do it for them.
- **Declutter regularly.** Monthly is best for kids with the amount of stuff they get. Put reminders in your calendar.
- **Remember that less is more.** Teach this from an early age. They don't need more stuff, but quality items they love.
- **Purge after holidays and parties.** On occasions where mass amounts of stuff come into the house, declutter right away and encourage giving or donating.
- **Designate a home for everything.** The same concept applies for adults. Make your kids understand this concept.
- **Allow messes.** Yes, I said it. Kids are creative, and sometimes messes happen. When they are done, they can clean up!
- **Use bins, cubbies, and baskets.** Get them in the habit of using storage containers (and, of course, labeling them).
- **Buy less.** Kids watch what you do. If you're constantly shopping and have lots of stuff, your kids will think this is normal.
- **Clean up before bed.** Make this a habit for life.
- **Have 20-minute challenges.** When clutter builds up, make fun challenges and give everyone chores.
- **Accept kids.** You will likely not be able to live the same minimal life you had before kids. Kids need stuff, and you have to accept that, but you can work in your values around decluttering.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Determining what should be stored
- Strategizing storage of sentimental items
- Managing media and more

Chapter 9
Decluttering Your Storage Spaces

This is a tough chapter, and I am not going to lie. Decluttering storage spaces isn't easy or quick. Storage spaces are likely the spot where you put everything — not just items that you know you will use annually, like Christmas decorations, but items that you've postponed decluttering because the thought is too stressful to deal with.

Also, decluttering your storage items usually means making a bigger mess, so you need to carve out the necessary time to tackle this project. Decluttering storage spaces requires removing items that may be dusty or dirty, and have been stored for years, so be prepared for a big job. (This is not the quick ten-minute decluttering session that can instantly improve your living room.) You are going to need to dedicate some serious time and effort to this, but trust me, the results are worth it. Having all your stuff crammed into storage spaces is useless because you can never find what you need, and you've probably forgotten about it altogether, which renders your items useless.

I am a fan of storage spaces, and I think having a designated spot for handy and/or occasional-use items is necessary. What I'm not a fan of are these spaces becoming dumping grounds for anything

and everything, making it impossible to get the occasional use out of items that you need.

In this chapter, I give general tips for tackling these spaces, whether you have an attic, basement, rented storage locker, or a space under your stairs for storage. This chapter applies to wherever you store "attic-like" items. I also drill down a bit deeper into the most common items that tend to be stored in attics or similar places, and why I don't recommend storing them in attics at all!

Tackling Storage Spaces

My advice for decluttering usually centers around starting small a few minutes a day, making slow and steady progress, celebrating your successes, and then sustaining your systems. However, your storage spaces are a different story. If you declutter for ten minutes a day, it may take you years to finish these spaces because just the process of getting into your storage area and moving items around can take you ten minutes. I warned you already that this is going to be one of your more dedicated decluttering missions, and I wasn't kidding.

TIP

I would attack this space full-on. Clear your schedule, enlist support, and start decluttering. Even though you don't see this space, knowing it is free and clear of clutter can also help clear your mental space. Hiding clutter doesn't mean it doesn't exist and doesn't enter your mind. Even thinking about the clutter in your attic for one minute a day means you're thinking about it 365 minutes (or 6 hours) a year — time you could have taken to just declutter it and make room for other thoughts. With this final warning, it's time to dive in.

I want your storage space to be a place you love going to because you know exactly what's in it, you can easily access items when needed, and you have peace of mind knowing where everything is located. More often than not, our storage spaces are a pain in the butt for us and we dread the thought of going in them. The practical tips I share can help change this mindset.

First of all, I want you to feel grateful that you have a storage space. And if you have no storage space — not even a storage locker in your building — feel grateful that you don't have to spends hours on end decluttering it!

If you don't have any storage space, you still need to find a way to store items that you occasionally use. I not only highlight some common items that are found in storage spaces, but I even recommend other spots for them in the future. Storage spaces are really for storage of items you sometimes use, and that's it.

Getting started with a handful of steps

Before I dive into the categories of what may be in your attic, I want to focus on a few steps that are really important to help you get started:

1. **Safety first!**

   If your storage is in an attic or basement, you want to be extra cautious when starting your decluttering mission. Make sure floorboards are safe, put on a mask if there could be something dangerous in the air, and wear gloves to protect your hands. I am also a big fan of lighting in my storage spaces, and chances are you can improve the lighting in yours. Wear a clamp-on headlight if you don't have lots of light and/or bring additional lighting with you until you find a more permanent solution. Make sure to watch your head if there are low ceilings or beams!

2. **Take everything out.**

   There is no way around this and it may be a terrible task, but you have to do it. Take out boxes, baskets, furniture, and whatever else you may have stored. You may need help with larger items, and if something doesn't fit through the door, you may have to take it apart to get it out of there!

3. **Clean.**

   Your storage space will inevitably be dusty. Remove dust and clean the empty space because there's no better chance to do this than when everything has been removed. Vacuum and sweep all the nooks and crannies.

4. **Inspect and fix.**

   You want to make sure there is nothing dangerous, from mold to loose floorboards. Do a thorough inspection of the space and fix what is required. Also take note of the temperature — is it frigid or so hot you can melt an ice cube in 30 seconds? Sometimes your storage spaces are not insulated property, and this is important for what you will be storing there.

5. **Practice prevention.**

   After your efforts in cleaning and updating your space, make sure you prevent dust and mold from accumulating in the first place. Seal cracks to prevent moisture and dust from coming in. You may even want to seek professional support if needed to help with this.

REMEMBER

What I did not mention in these steps is to build special racks or shelves or invest in expensive storage units. Your storage spaces should really be for items you use only occasionally, and therefore you don't need fancy devices or shelving for these to be stored on. You need to store less stuff and really make sure you keep only those items you use at least once a year.

What shouldn't be stored but likely is

I hope now all your stuff is outside your storage space and ready to be decluttered! This is my favorite part, and I hope it can become yours too. There is nothing like being able to give your gently used items to someone else who will appreciate them more than you do.

I am going to talk about items that you may have in your attic but really shouldn't, but I am not going to list what you should be storing. Christmas decorations, seasonal items, and selected sentimental items are my basic suggestions, but you're on your own to make this list for whatever occasional items you have.

REMEMBER

Storage takes up precious real estate and should be an extension of your home. If you're paying for a storage space outside your home, you have an even bigger reason to declutter and save your money.

To start, look through the following list to see whether you removed any of these items from your storage space and declutter them. Don't put them back into storage because they don't belong there.

- **Clothing:** You can keep clothing in your storage area if you wear it and are only storing it for seasonal purposes or to avoid anything getting ruined. You should not store clothes you're never going to wear again. Donate these immediately so someone else can wear them today! Clothes you think you might wear one day also don't belong in storage. These should be in your closet and decluttered with the rest of your clothing. Also, the more fabrics you have in your storage, the greater the risk of moths and mice.

- **Paperwork:** Don't put paperwork in your storage space. Skip to the next section to get more details on what to do with paperwork.
- **Furniture:** Furniture should be used, not stored. If you don't use it, why are you keeping it?
- **Too many sentimental items:** If you have stacks and stacks of memory boxes, you can't possibly enjoy all the stuff in them, and you probably don't even remember what's in them in the first place. I discuss strategies for dealing with this later in this chapter.
- **Packing material and empty boxes:** Get rid of these ASAP.
- **Electronics:** By the time you find them, they are either too old, are no longer relevant, or have been ruined by dust or the elements. Technology moves fast, so don't store electronics. And if you love records, then keep reading because later I give advice on what to do with electronics you want to keep.
- **Old travel bags:** Not a week goes by that I don't see an ad for the latest new travel bag or suitcase that is lighter, more functional, has wireless charging, you name it! Holding onto old suitcases and travel bags is unnecessary. Keep your travel items up to date if you travel frequently, and if you don't travel, then why do you have these in the first place? Plus, airlines are getting stricter with weight and sizes, so traveling with your old huge, heavy suitcases probably isn't the best idea.
- **Photos:** It always bothers me when photos are stored in attics because no one can see them! Photos are meant to be viewed, especially if you took the time to print them. They should be taken care of, not stuffed in a box where they are likely getting ruined.

Getting realistic

As you're going through your items, I want you to get realistic with the things you have stored and ask yourself these questions:

- Why did I store it in the first place?
- How long ago did I store it?
- If you use an item occasionally, how often? Monthly? Annually? Every five years?

- Do I need this?
- Would I miss this if I didn't have it?
- Can I rent or borrow this?
- Does it cost me to keep this maintenance-wise?
- Is there a new version that is more efficient?

Make sure those items that make the cut after going through this list are properly packed before you re-store them. For example, you use your Christmas decorations every year, so make sure they are all together in a large labeled tote and that you only keep the stuff you actually use every year.

TIP

If you do have a large attic, this does not mean you have to fill it with stuff. A larger storage space isn't a free ride to more clutter.

Recycling packing material

How often do you keep boxes from your TVs, microwaves, and teeth whitening systems? If you never do, then great! If you have all three of these sitting in storage, it's time to get rid of them. Retailers are great at taking returns, but usually they only need to be in the original box if returned within the first 15 days. So keep the box in your home front and center until you decide to keep the product, and then promptly recycle the box. I have never needed the original box to send back an item to be fixed. If you have, then maybe keep the box, but I would question why the original box is necessary. Look into store policies to ensure that you make an educated decision as to whether you keep or toss an item's box.

It's not uncommon to move often; no longer do we spend 30 years in the same house, let alone the same city or country! You can decide how many boxes you plan to keep depending on how often you move. If you move every year and are a serious do-it-yourself mover, then maybe you should keep a few moving boxes. However, in my experience, boxes tend to become weathered even after only one move. Plus, you can buy used moving boxes quite easily; people usually list these for sale right after they move, which is a great idea — and you can do the same.

I have moved many times, and I have even lived out of my wardrobe boxes for months when I was in transition between apartments. I do love wardrobe boxes — they are the boxes that have a hanging space for your clothes. These are usually a bit better

quality and expensive. I keep these and use them for storing my seasonal items when not in use.

Keep your boxes and packing material if they can serve an alternate purpose and don't clutter up your space.

Determining a Strategy for Sentimental Items

I'm not going to lie: This is the section I have been dreading since I started writing this book. Not because I don't love organizing my sentimental items or sharing my advice on this topic, but because it is and always will be an emotional topic for everyone — myself included.

Everyone's definition of what is sentimental to them is different. I will never tell you what you should or should not keep, which is why I take a different approach. I try to focus on a strategy for helping you declutter your sentimental items rather than saying what those items should or shouldn't be.

Memories and items, especially from past loved ones, are precious, and I completely respect that and want you to keep whatever brings you the most happiness.

Time to talk strategy!

How much is too much?

Sentimental items can bring you lots of joy until you end up with so many that you have boxes and boxes filled with ticket stubs from every concert you ever attended and every drawing your kid ever made you. I recently had to declutter my grandmother's belongings and determined she was a serious sentimental clutterbug; I found every single postcard that she had ever received. There were literally 20 shoeboxes of them, and the sad part was she never once looked at them. There were simply too many!

The key is to be selective in what you keep. Had my grandmother selected five special postcards out of the 20 boxes of them, she would have been able to look at them regularly and enjoy the memories from each one.

Going through your sentimental items should be a joy, and the more selective you are about how much you keep, the better the process will be.

Still, people continue to ask me questions about the number of sentimental items they should keep.

Here are a few guidelines I follow for my own life. By no means do you have to follow these exactly, but they can provide a framework to help you in your decluttering process.

- **Your childhood memories:** One or two boxes should suffice.
- **Your kid's mementos:** Some parents keep their kid's room as-is with all their stuff in it. Others keep a few boxes of their favorite items. There is no way to determine an amount here, but asking your kids for insight can help determine what to keep.
- **Relationship mementos:** If you're still together, creating a sentimental box may be a great project to discuss with your partner and do together. If you're separated, don't keep these items and move on.
- **Parents' or grandparents' items:** I have one large box labeled, "Grosi (Grandmother in German) Sentimental Items." My mom and I together made this box of our most treasured items from my late grandmother. We often look at it together.
- **Career memorabilia:** You really should not keep paperwork from courses or your previous work. Consider maybe digital storage if you actually do reference them. Awards, diplomas, cards, and trinkets are best kept at your office in sight versus storing them. After your career ends or when you're starting a new one, think about what is really important to you as you don't want to be starting a new job and hanging onto ten boxes of stuff.
- **Miscellaneous:** Be selective and understand that the less you have, the more you will really appreciate those items.

Saving only the best

On the same theme of determining how much you should keep, I encourage you to change your mindset and keep only one of

something where you have many and make it count. Hanging onto multiples or bulk saving will not make your items more special.

TIP

Go through your items and pick the ones that bring you the most memories or happiness and keep those. Discard the rest.

Giving it time

I know it is hard to part with sentimental items, and it may take time to do this. If something is obviously trash or broken, it's likely easier to get rid of even if it is sentimental.

TIP

If you are having trouble determining what to keep and what to discard, put those items in a box labeled with a big question mark. Store this for a maximum of six months and consider this a grieving period for your sentimental items. I know letting go can be emotional, and I want you to really be ready. Put a note on your calendar to revisit your question boxes once you've had time to reflect on the items before you decide if you will keep them or declutter them.

As an alternative, take photos of items and create a photo album titled "Sentimental." Often this is better than keeping the items because you can access the photos from anywhere and share them with others.

Where to store them?

If your items are precious enough to keep, why are you storing them in some musty attic or damp basement?

I recommend getting serious about these items before you decide to keep them. Here are a few tips on how to store the items you've decided to hang onto:

- **Get a nice box.** Ensure that the items you're keeping have a nice home. This box, basket, or whatever other item you use to store your sentimental items should be pretty enough to be on display. I keep my items in white round hatboxes with labels on them.
- **Label the items.** Even better, take a photo of the box or basket so you know what's inside.
- **Make them easily accessible.** There is no point in keeping items if you can't access them.

- **Schedule time to use/look at them.** Why not make a date with Mom to go through your childhood memory box? This will make a fun evening and encourage you both to look at these items.
- **Show them off.** Give your items a new home and bring them into your everyday life so you can see them.

Sorting Your Books

I hope you don't keep your books in storage; if you do, that's not a great way for anyone to read them. Books should be read and enjoyed by as many people as possible, and this is why I think it's important to address them during this chapter. I mean, you are physically reading this book, and I don't expect you to keep it forever. I actually encourage you to pass it along to others or recycle it after you have taken all the tips you need for your lifestyle. Because it is a reference book, you may want to hang onto it for longer than most until you have mastered all the techniques, but then it is ready for a new home!

Reading and decorating OR reading and decluttering

Books today can be read, reread, donated, recycled, and used for decorations. In this section, I am primarily talking only about *physical* books, not the ones on your tablets or e-readers.

Start by gathering all your books from all locations and sorting them. This may be a big job, and if your books are literally too far away, then you may have to go room by room to where they reside.

The way you sort will depend on what genre of books you have. If you have fiction and nonfiction, begin by sorting into these two categories. Typically, you read fiction once and then you can pass it along. You can further sort nonfiction by types of books, from self-help to reference to biographies. Nonfiction books that you keep going back to for reference should generally be kept accessible. Nonfiction that you only read once can be passed along!

TIP

A few other tips about book storage:

- **You can save your favorites.** You don't have to get rid of all your books because you've read them. The books that you truly love and keep reaching for can have a permanent spot, but you have to set some boundaries as to which ones are your favorites.
- **Go digital.** They take up less space, which is especially helpful when you're traveling.
- **Use books as decorations.** As you can probably tell, I don't like too much stuff around that can collect dust, with the exception of books. I love the way books look on a bookshelf, coffee table, and as accent decorations. However, be mindful that they get dusty, and unless you are committed to dusting them regularly, you should not have them as decorations.
- **Remove references or sections.** If you are interested in a page or a part of a book, why not remove that section or take a picture of it with your phone instead of keeping it in its entirety?
- **The book is not the memory.** Remember the joy you got from reading the book. It's not always necessary to keep it.
- **Forwarding books is the biggest act of kindness.** It feels good to be able to enhance someone else's life with books. Libraries and fundraisers are always happy to accept gently used books!
- **Lend books.** If you're not ready to fully part with your books yet, try lending them first to see the joy they give other people.
- **Declutter a book a day.** I once read advice somewhere that if you declutter something every day, you will have decluttered 365 items over the year. This is an especially great concept for books and can provide you and your family a good challenge.

REMEMBER

Your book collection does not define how smart you are or how much knowledge you have. Keeping books for only this purpose and not actually reading them is a total waste of space. Keep this in mind as you declutter!

Decluttering electronic and audio books

I am a huge fan of books on my Audible app and on my Kindle. I love being able to instantly buy a book and read it right away. I also love being able to carry all the books I want to read with me on vacation, and I love listening to audio books, especially when doing mundane tasks or working out. However, my love for these types of books can also lead to a cluttered mess. If you buy many of these, consider forming a group so you can share them by giving each other account access or getting memberships to keep the costs down.

If you have many books saved and downloaded, be aware that this is also taking up valuable real estate on your hard drive, which will need to be decluttered.

With the ability to store literally 10,000+ books at your fingertips, getting clear about how you organize them is important from the start. I sort mine by genre. Thinking about lending your device to a friend may be a good motivator for you to properly declutter and organize your electronic and audio books.

Decluttering Furniture

If you have furniture stored, I advise you to get rid of it. You may be keeping it because "someday" you might need it for your bigger house, or your kids might need it for college, or because you've moved and literally kept all the furniture you've ever had.

Much of the furniture you have may be left over from moves or even given to you by relatives, but the problem is if it doesn't fit in your space now, it's only taking up storage space for something else. And worse, if you are trying to use it and it doesn't fit, you are blocking the way to a better piece of furniture that could be providing added benefits to your space.

REMEMBER

Lots of people are always looking for used furniture, so list it for sale or donate it to a rustic resort or shelter. Furniture should be carefully selected for the space you're currently living in; otherwise, it looks like clutter and is an eyesore.

Electronic Items

If your computer, laptop, TV, and other electronics were made before 2000, chances are they can't be refurbished and it's time to let them go. Maybe some of the parts can be used for things or by scrap metal collectors, but make sure you dispose of them properly because they don't do well in landfills.

Chances are you are also keeping lots of cables and power cords. Part of the problem is that we do need different chargers for different devices, and these can quickly accumulate. Gather all your cords together and discard what you don't need and any that are frayed. If you don't know what the cord is for, get rid of it — you can always buy a new one if you need it. Use the same approach for other tech gadgets and accessories. Just remember to recycle them.

Finding a designated space for your tech accessories is the next step because they should not be in storage. You really must do this to help keep them organized; otherwise, you will waste time when you need them. Maybe each member of your family has a designated spot for electrical items. Rubberbands work wonders for keeping cords together.

Apart from the items that we keep just in case our phone breaks or just in case we need that extra landline phone cable, electronics — from mixed tapes to family home videos on VHS — can be full of memories. The thing is, technology moves fast and you need to keep up; otherwise, you won't be able to view your memories anymore.

As I was writing this, I was thinking about my old family movies on VHS. I did some research and was able to successfully get them onto a memory stick. I found out that there are a few ways to modernize your old videotapes and places that do it for you, including Walmart, Walgreens, and Costco.

Try to modernize everything you want to keep. You don't need duplicates on a CD and in your iCloud library. And music can be downloaded, so why keep physical records, tapes, and CDs? If you do have a record player and enjoy it, then keep your record player and records in a spot in your home, not in storage.

TIP

After you have your music stored digitally, remember that this can also quickly become a cluttered mess. If you are a serious music fan, you should have an idea on how to best organize your music by genre, playlists, or artist. Whatever you decide, make a system and stick to it. Declutter weekly if you're accumulating many new songs on a regular basis.

Decluttering Paper

I need to address paper, which should not be shoved at the back of an attic. I also want to encourage you to modernize your paper going forward as much as possible, keeping them digitally decluttered, of course.

Dealing with paperwork

If you have a business, you likely have boxes of your accounting documents because legally you need to keep these for a certain number of years (the number is dependent on where you operate your business). Yes, keep these documents until they are ready to go to the shredder, and if possible, don't store your business records in an attic — you will forget about them, and they will stay well past their due date. Skip ahead to Chapter 11 to find out how I digitally store all my accounting records.

Other paper you may have in your attic should not be stored here. If you keep every single document from a training or client contract, you should keep this in your office space, not your attic, so you don't forget about it. Any important documents regarding finances, wills, and insurance should also not be stored in the attic or hard-to-reach storage areas because when you need them, they should be easily accessible. If you really want to get technical, they should be in a fireproof safe!

Managing magazines

I love magazines of all genres. I now have an app and read them digitally for a lower monthly fee than when I used to buy the physical copies, and this has significantly reduced my clutter. The one caution I have is that digital magazines often lure people into making online purchases, making other potential clutter come into your home easier.

If you do have physical magazines, storing them is useless unless you really have a good storage system that allows you to read them frequently.

I don't advocate keeping magazines, especially not fashion, gossip, or hobby magazines because the content and trends change so quickly that they will soon be out of date. If you really love an article or photo in a magazine you're reading, keep that page or take a photo with your phone and store it in the appropriate album. Pass along magazines to friends or doctors' offices, or recycle them.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Catering what you store to what you do
- Surveying seasonal and categorical decluttering strategies
- Tackling tools and toys

Chapter 10
Decluttering Your Garage

I understand that garage decluttering is tough because most of us use the garage as a dumping ground for clutter. Similar to the attic or other storage areas, the garage is one of the first places we put things we don't need or want to toss. Meanwhile, these items generally never leave the garage, which causes clutter to build up. The garage also has no boundaries; it can basically be a home for anything and everything, from cars to clothes to Christmas decorations. There's no limit to what can go in a garage!

Garages can be dirty and cold, or they can be works of art with tiled floors and framed photos of hot rods. Garages are often thought to be a man's favorite place, but women also have grown fond of their uses, from storing sporting equipment to setting up crafts and hobbies.

For those of you who don't have a garage (maybe you park on the street and are dreaming of a garage, or you live in the city and don't have a car or even a storage locker), bear with me. This chapter outlines tips for general storage that you can apply to your future garage if you eventually move into a home with more storage.

REMEMBER

One thing is for sure: Garages are made for vehicles, and if your vehicle doesn't fit, it's a sure sign of too much clutter.

Getting Real on What You Actually "Do"

Giving advice on garages is especially challenging because everyone has a different idea about what does and doesn't belong in the garage. To start, I want to go back to Chapter 1 where I talk about fitting your stuff to your lifestyle.

I want you to be really honest with yourself through this entire chapter — more honest than you have been throughout the entire book. Without a doubt, the garage is going to bring up some emotional discussions that will make you realize you can't ski anymore due to your knee injury. Or you are not allowed to go on motorbike trips anymore because you're now responsible for four kids. Whatever the reason for not using use the stuff in your garage, it's likely a sore spot for you to deal with. No one likes admitting that they're getting older. The belongings you hang onto must reflect the stage of life you're in, as well as any changes to your lifestyle. Perhaps it's time to get rid of your camping equipment if you haven't slept on the ground for 15 years, or the toys you hang onto because you might use them "someday." Trust me: It's better to get rid of these items. If it turns out you need something you got rid of, you can always purchase it new or used, or even rent it or borrow it from a friend.

TIP

Before we begin, instead of the usual pretty boxes I've recommended to help you in the decluttering process, I suggest making sure you have some heavy-duty trash bags, a heavy-duty broom or vacuum, and a general big basket or box for items that have made their way into your garage but don't belong there.

It's time to get real about what you no longer need or use, and the following tips should help:

- **Do an overview clean.** Do a basic cleaning to get started, moving similar items together (and tossing as you go). Remove items from the floor and clean any stains, cobwebs, and dirt to make it easier when you do a thorough declutter.
- **Get your trash bags ready.** As I mention earlier, you can forgo the pretty decluttering boxes and get bags ready

instead. Label the bags "Toss," "Keep," "Donate," and "Repurpose."

- **Think about creative storage.** As you're doing your garage sweep, think about how to make your storage more functional. The garage can be the best place for creative storage, from using pegboards to PVC piping for garden tool storage. From ceiling to walls, the possibilities are endless.

Decluttering Seasonally

I encourage you to declutter in one of two ways: either seasonally or by categories. If you live in a place like California where you have one season, skip this section and go to decluttering by category instead of season.

Spring/summer

You probably move and store items twice a year: once for spring/summer and again for fall/winter.

I love it when seasons come and go. I love it when the warm spring weather comes and bright colors begin to become a staple instead of blacks and browns. I also love being able to get out my rollerblades, bikes, hiking shoes, and paddleboards. All of these things are typically stored in a garage or some type of storage locker if you live in a climate with winter.

When you uncover all your fun spring and summer items, you may get excited to use them, but be realistic about whether you actually will. This is the best time to sell these items to make money if you are not going to use them; typically, people start looking for specific sporting items at the beginning of the current season and will typically pay more for an item then than at the end of the season. After you have assessed what you will use, store it efficiently.

When you're getting out your spring/summer items, it is also a great time to declutter your winter items. Often, I get so excited to use my new stuff for the current season that I forget to do this. A few of you might also have this habit. However, this is the most important step.

REMEMBER

Before you unpack, fix, and clean your stuff for the current season, declutter and properly store your items from the previous season! Read this a few times so it really sinks in. I think this may be one of the best pieces of advice in this entire chapter!

REMEMBER

Here are tips for storing your fall/winter gear:

- **Evaluate before you store.** Did you use those skis this season? Did you wear that parka? If you didn't wear, use, or need it this fall or winter, why are you storing it? Donate or discard it fast before you change your mind.
- **Protect your equipment.** For skis and snowboards, put a thick coat of wax on them before you store them so next season you can scrape it off and be ready to go. Wax helps protect your gear from drying out. Sharpen skates, clean hockey equipment, polish helmets, and make sure nothing is damaged before you store it. Whatever items you used in the winter and are keeping, you should clean, protect, and store.
- **Deep-clean.** On the same page as protecting your items, this is a great time to deep-clean your outerwear. You can use special wash for gore-tex or waterproof outerwear, and consider taking your cashmere and special jackets to the dry cleaners. For your base layers, give them one last hot wash before they are stored.
- **Determine appropriate storage.** Storage should always be clean and dry, and your sporting items are not excluded from this. You don't want your items to smell musty or be ruined when you need them again. Make sure you find a good spot for storage that's not too difficult to reach so next year it won't be a pain to grab your items. I suggest labeling your boxes and even taking a photo of what is inside if the boxes are not see-through.
- **Replace what isn't fit to store.** If some of your items are really worn or could be replaced or fixed, do this now. If you replace your items at the end of the season, they'll likely be on sale versus having to purchase them at a high price at the start of next season. Plus, you'll be ready to go instead of scrambling to get your gear prepared.

TIP

Winter items can be bulky to store, especially big jackets. Getting some compression or vacuum pack bags can really help reduce the bulk, and these can be found at most hardware and department stores. Even Ziploc makes them.

Fall/winter

The reverse happens in fall/winter as you get excited to wear deeper, darker colors and enjoy the crisp, cool air. If you are a winter sports enthusiast, you probably get excited for the first snowfall or count down the days until the lake makes a giant skating rink. Being from Canada, I am a winter sports enthusiast (you basically have to be because most of the country is under frigid conditions for the better part of the year). Growing up, I had tons of winter gear, making me an expert at storing it.

Assuming you stored your winter gear properly at the end of the previous season (see the preceding section), it should be a breeze to get it out and use it right away.

When taking out your winter equipment, make sure you have the proper storage for it. Winter items usually should not be left outside due to the temperature, but they're also likely to drip and be wet, so it's a double whammy. You need to keep your items warm and the house dry. Install drip trays and hooks, and find unique places to hang or store larger items.

Again, the most important part of fall/winter storage is taking the time to properly store your spring/summer items, no matter how busy or excited you are to hit the slopes.

REMEMBER

The keys to storing your spring/summer items are as follows:

- **Evaluate before you store.** This is the exact same advice as for the other seasons. Just do it.
- **Protect and clean.** Certain floatable devices, summer clothing, and even wetsuits should be cleaned and may even need repairs before they are stored.
- **Determine appropriate storage.** Label containers and make sure you also take photos of what's inside, especially if you might take a trip to a warmer climate midway through winter and need to access these items.

- **Replace what isn't fit to store.** Same as the previous advice. Check floatation devices and floaties because these often don't have long life spans. Replace what you'll need next year; otherwise, consider tossing. Sporting equipment should be tested to make sure it still holds up and is safe to use.

Decluttering Categorically

You may have skipped directly to this section, especially if you don't have seasons, or maybe because it's easier for you to declutter this way. Whatever the reason, the categories I list are the basics, but you may have lots of others, so feel free to keep decluttering by whatever categories you have. The main thing is to stay consistent, and start small by either decluttering for a few minutes every day or tackling one category at a time.

REMEMBER

Be honest and realistic about what you actually use now, not what you previously used or think you will use someday. Also remember your age; the sports and activities you did in your twenties may not be something you regularly participate in at this age, so there's no need to hang onto unnecessary items. Keep in mind that technology moves fast with sporting equipment, and make sure to always store similar items together.

Decluttering sporting goods

I love sports and fitness and think everyone should make this a part of their lives. However, I don't think we need the thousands of new gadgets and the newest version of everything each year. If you are a professional or training to be a professional, then yes, you may have different sporting items for certain conditions or purchase new things more frequently. For the general population, though, get real on how often you do the sport and how much stuff you actually need.

Go through what you have and declutter what you don't need. The wonderful thing about sporting goods is that these items are great to donate because lots of kids are in need of these items.

Really think hard about what you keep. If you haven't used your figure skates in four years but know you will skate someday, then

why not rent the skates next time? They will surely be newer and likely have sharper edges than the ones you are holding onto. Plus, you could be passing on those skates to be used right away by someone who needs them!

REMEMBER

A few tips regarding sporting goods:

- **Store bicycles up and away.** Bikes should be stored inside to prevent corrosion from the elements and so they are not stolen. There are lots of nifty ways to store bikes on walls and from the ceiling today. This is the best option because you will see your suspended bike more, which may make you go biking more often. Plus, bike lifts can free up space in your garage. Figure 10-1 shows a bike lift that attaches to your ceiling and uses an easy pulley system to raise and lower the bike.
- **Consider hallway lockers.** If you have a family with lots of sporting equipment they frequently use, hallway lockers may be a great way to give them their own space and also the accountability to keep their stuff organized and decluttered. They can only fit so much stuff in a locker before it won't close!
- **Place a bench in the garage.** A bench will not only make your family happy to put on their sports gear, but some benches even come with storage underneath, which will entice your family to keep these items in the garage rather than trekking them into the rest of the house.

Decluttering camping supplies

Camping supplies have always challenged me. I used to camp when I was a kid; I loved it and have wonderful memories from camping. My parents, on the other hand, did not enjoy it because it's lots of work — first, to get all the camping equipment, then to set it up, take it down, clean it, and store it for the next time you go camping.

I am by no means saying don't camp. If you love it and it brings you joy, then keep camping and keep your camping gear. But camping stuff has a funny way of working itself into your life even if you don't camp. You may have the best intentions to camp all summer but only go once due to your kids' crazy sports practices and games scheduled for every weekend.

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FIGURE 10-1: Suspended bike storage.

WARNING

I am always shocked by the amount of camping equipment and new technology available today. Venture into any outdoor store and you will be amazed at what new camping invention has arrived to make the experience more enjoyable. Even people who don't camp will want to buy this stuff, so be careful when going into outdoor stores (unnecessary gear can quickly turn into clutter). Even the most well-heeled city dweller can be enticed by the newest gadgets.

Here are a few tips on decluttering your current camping supplies or new gear (if you didn't take my advice and went inside an outdoor store):

- **Avoid immediately replacing items due to the potential "empty garage syndrome."** Decluttering your items can make you feel lighter and more organized, but it won't

immediately change your purchasing habits. Make sure you stay mindful to avoid impulsive purchases post–camping decluttering.

- **Envision the rewards of not only how much time you will save in your garage, but how much better you will feel with the carefully selected pieces that remain.** Make sure your camping gear is specific to how often you go camping and your camping style, as well as the time of year and conditions you camp in.

Decluttering fishing gear

I had to include this because my parents owned a fishing resort for 20 years, so I am well aware of what fishing stuff entails, and it is much more than a rod and a few lures. Fishing is often laden with memories, like old times fishing with your father or colleagues. If you like or love fishing, it likely has something to do with your memories, making the decluttering process more emotional.

Go through your fishing tackle, rods, and gear after each season and determine what you are still using and what needs to be replaced.

REMEMBER

You may have sentimental fishing items in your cabin or lures from your grandfather that have special meaning. That's okay, but don't keep these stored with your fishing items. Rather, keep them in your sentimental box. Plus, you likely don't need to keep all 100 of his lures; keep only one and trust that your memories will last forever.

Another thing to remember is to hang up your rods. I once saw a great invention of using a pool noodle with slits in it to keep them in place — a simple and cheap way to store items rather than building a big, complicated system.

Decluttering car accessories

How many car accessories you own depends on how much you care for your car inside and out. If you wash your car weekly, I assume you have a healthy selection of shampoos, brushes, and cloths. If you try to do some maintenance on your car, you may also have specific tools for this. The same principles apply to car accessories and supplies: If you don't use them and/or suddenly don't need them anymore, get rid of them.

Along the same lines as the stuff *for* your car is the stuff *in* your car. Firestone Tires has concluded that the average American spends 600 hours each year in his car. And this can lead to a cluttered car if you aren't careful.

In addition, clutter around the driver's area can be dangerous. Today there are many great solutions for car storage, including specialty cargo organizers, back-seat organizers, and if your beloved pet travels with you, a variety of items including pet hammocks.

I include this quick section for the importance that it has related to safety. In Chapter 1, I go into detail about the distraction that clutter can cause for your mind. Distracted driving is a very dangerous thing, so keeping your car clutter-free will improve your driving and your ability to focus! Safety and clutter-free go hand in hand in my books.

Decluttering miscellaneous items

I could make a 30-page list of what else you could have in your garage, but the main thing is to be practical with what you're keeping. Here are some ideas on how to store your items:

- **Work wonders with shoe organizers.** For spray paint cans, spare tools, mittens, and winter items, shoe organizers are an easy and cheap option for storage — the possibilities are endless with these genius inventions! And the beauty of them is that you can hang them wherever and store them when the season is done.
- **Use magnetic strips.** I talk about these in the upcoming tool section, but think beyond tools. You can get empty metal cans to store paintbrushes in and hang them. Plus, they're easy to replace.
- **Invest in gadgets you use daily.** Invest in making your garage as user-friendly as possible. As I state in the introduction, this is the place where clutter can often build up, such as recycling, boxes, and items that should be fixed. Consider which items you always need, and make a commitment to yourself to always have these on hand. For example, are you always using packing tape? Make a section for this. Also, get recycling boxes and label them to help your family get in this habit.
- **Make your entranceway in your garage.** More often than not, our garages are just a place for stuff and our cars. They

are not pretty or warm or fun places to hang out (that is, unless you are a car enthusiast or have a man cave). Creating an entranceway in your garage can help keep the clutter and dirt out of your home in the first place. Use benches, hooks, rugs, and whatever will entice the people in your household to use this as a first stop before entering your home.

- **Install wall racks.** These can be great for storing everything from cleaning supplies to extra produce and drinks to gardening supplies. Using baskets is also a great way to ensure you see what is in the racks and prevent clutter from building up.
- **Employ bungee cords.** Another staple in garages is bungee cords, which are a great way to secure sporting balls, hang up random items, and fix things. The possibilities are endless, and they are a great item to have on hand.
- **Lock up dangerous items.** Your garage may be home to chemicals or sharp tools. It is best to keep these in a locked cabinet.
- **Create zones or areas.** It's easy to make zones for your sports equipment, car supplies, and other specific categories I address earlier. Consider other categories of items you have as well, such as crafts, painting, recycling, gardening tools, exercise equipment, and so on. Dedicate a specific area to each category of stuff you have.

For all your miscellaneous items, I recommend not buying storage units or items until you declutter. Take a really conservative approach and use what you have, install a few shelves, and go from there. It's easy to get carried away in garages with all these extra items, so remember to evaluate them first.

Decluttering Tools

Wondering what tools you should keep? The ones you use, obviously! Still, it can be difficult to decide which items to hang onto. Following are the basic tools to consider keeping:

- Hammer
- Wire cutters
- Pliers

- Screwdrivers (multihead are the best)
- Wrench (adjustable)
- Knife (retractable for safety)
- Cordless drill (super handy)
- Staple gun
- Nails, screws, nuts, and bolts
- Plastic anchors (especially for hanging things)
- Hooks
- String (or fishing line)
- Tape measure
- Level
- Stud finder
- Pencil
- Sandpaper
- Duct tape
- Strong glue (like Gorilla or Krazy glue)
- Flashlight
- Safety equipment (glasses, gloves, and so on)

I'm sure I have missed many items on this list and included some you may not need. If you're a contractor or work with tools on a regular basis, your list will be much longer than this. And if you do no home repairs and outsource everything, you may have nothing on this list. This is just a very general guide.

If you have a lot of tools, keep the ones you regularly use. If you get a new tool, don't keep the old one. Get rid of duplicates right away as well as tools you don't know how to use (let's face it, if you haven't tried to learn by now, you likely never will).

Tools that are broken should be discarded and replaced if needed, so truly determine the frequency of use of your tools. Determine whether you can borrow or rent tools instead because this is a sure way to minimize clutter (and save money).

Make sure the tools you decide to keep are well organized because nothing is worse than starting a project and not being able to find the tools that you know you have to complete it. Figure 10-2 shows a well-used and well-designed tool storage board.

Free-Photos / Pixabay

FIGURE 10-2: Tool storage.

Labeling your items

Labeling your items is good advice for any area of your home, but it's especially important for your tools because you generally need to grab them quickly. Having dedicated spots and labels for your tools will help you to keep them ready when you need them and also help you stay clutter-free. As with anything, if you find yourself creating 20 new labels a week, you're accumulating too much stuff that can lead to clutter.

Renting versus buying

Today there are lots of options to rent tools — more so for larger equipment than your basic toolbox and screwdrivers. Your local hardware store is usually happy to show you what they have for rent, and you can then do the cost analysis of whether it is worth it to buy or to rent these items. When you're doing your analysis, you have to remember to factor in the cost of potential breakdowns and also assign weight to the precious real estate you give up in your home to place that tool. I am a big fan of renting items when you don't need them on a regular basis, because when you rent you are usually using more up-to-date equipment and don't have to worry about maintenance.

Decluttering Big Kid Toys

The items I am referring to may not be toys and may very well be useful motorized equipment. As with all my advice, if you use it, keep it! If you don't, declutter it. The value and the size of your items don't matter — it's the value they bring to your life in terms of usage and benefits that do.

Decluttering boats, trailers, snowmobiles, and four-wheelers

I am not saying you should immediately get rid of all your small motorized devices. What I am suggesting is that you evaluate them and determine how often you use them. In addition, I advise you to review the motivation before purchasing these items. In my experience, for example, small, personal watercraft are fun until you realize you only used them twice the entire summer. Did you buy them because your neighbor had them? Because you thought you would use them every weekend? Get practical as you evaluate which items you want to hang onto and which items you're willing to declutter.

Small motorized equipment that is for pleasure and does not serve a purpose should be well–thought out purchases. Don't give into the latest fad, and make sure you purchase within your budget. Be ready to sell if you end up not using them.

Answer these questions honestly to help you better determine your needs for your items:

- Do I use them?
- How often?
- Is this for pure fun, or does it also serve a functional purpose?
- What is the cost analysis of renting instead?
- Could I share items with my neighbor?

Decluttering motorcycles

Motorcycles are usually a hobby, but if they are your main mode of transportation, then that is a different story. With motorcycles

comes lots of decluttering, and the motorcycle itself is one of the items to declutter.

With many of us living in cities with no garages, storage becomes an issue. Many places offer motorcycle storage over the winter, for a fee, of course. If you have a Harley-Davidson, for example, your local Harley dealer may offer this service. This is a great storage option if you don't have the space, and most dealers usually service the motorcycle for you.

If you only use your bike a few times a year, is it worth it to have one? Today there are many options to rent bikes, so keep this in mind before you rush to purchase one. In addition, make sure you declutter the "stuff" that comes with your motorcycle, such as the following:

- **Tools:** Make sure you have what you need and discard the rest. Same goes for your bike cleaning supplies.
- **Clothing:** You should definitely have specialty clothing for both comfort and safety, but go through your clothing every season and toss or replace items if they are worn. I also recommend donating or selling what you don't wear.
- **Other stuff:** With being a bike enthusiast, chances are you get lots of gifts or even buy yourself trinkets related to motorcycling. Be wary of what you receive and buy because these likely have no bearing on your actual biking activity but rather are dust collectors. I mean, are you actually going to use those Harley clocks your friends keep buying for you? Again, be practical.

Decluttering lawn and snow equipment

If you have lawn and snow equipment, you're likely living on a property with a lawn or driveway requiring snow removal. Be grateful you have the space and can do this. City dwellers may dream of having space and yearn to do yardwork on weekends, while those from the country wish all they had to do was drive out of their temperature-controlled garage and have a cocktail instead of mowing the lawn on Saturdays.

If you have a lawn and/or driveway, you need stuff to take care of it, unless you want to completely outsource this, which may make more sense after you do a cost/benefit analysis. Many companies

offer these services, and the added benefit is that you don't need to store the items, maintain them, or take your precious time to do the work. I believe that outsourcing can be the best approach, but this is a personal choice.

TIP

Review your lawn equipment after the season and either declutter or replace items. Do the same for your snow equipment after the winter.

Of course, all the usual rules apply — you need to have a dedicated spot for these items, and they should be as close to the exit as possible for ease of use.

Little kid toys

If you have kids, refer to Chapter 8 on decluttering kids' areas. The garage can be a place that kids' stuff can accumulate, especially outdoor toys and seasonal items.

- **Sand toys:** Kids often have toys from their sandbox or outdoor play areas such as buckets, toy trucks, and small gadgets. Decide what they still use and then donate the rest.
- **Water toys:** If your kids play in the water or if you have a pool, then you likely have accumulated many water toys. From floaties to pool noodles, decide what is still in good shape and discard the rest. Be careful about donating these items because normally they only last for one or two seasons.
- **Sporting equipment:** Yes, your kids' tiny basketball net is cute, but do you really need to keep it now that they are in college?

Apply the same principles as in Chapter 8 to whatever else your kids may have in the garage. Don't forget to involve your kids and make their garage storage space easy to reach and clean. ***Remember:*** The more involved they are, the more likely they are to keep up the organization.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Getting rid of what you don't need
- Storing paper documents digitally
- Keeping receipts

Chapter 11
Shifting from Paper to Digital

The goal of this chapter is to get you to change your mindset completely — to eliminate the paper you have and store it digitally. I realize that you may have lots of paper already, and you are going to have to sort through your paper piles. It may not be pretty or fun, but you have to do this to avoid misplacing important documents or keeping things you don't need.

REMEMBER

Before we dive into eliminating paper clutter, make note of the basics of office decluttering that can apply:

- **Determine what you use.** Don't save things for "just in case," like cables, files, or other work items, whether physical or digital.
- **Declutter daily.** Spend a few minutes clearing your workspace and planning for the next day. Keep on top of your system and declutter weekly or even daily depending on the amount of information that comes in.
- **Rearrange what doesn't work.** Pay close attention to your space and make it as efficient as possible. ***Remember:*** Don't immediately buy new supplies, because after you declutter, you'll want to shift more of your systems to digital media, requiring fewer physical items that take up space.

Ready for the fun stuff? It's time to get rid of paper once and for all, one tree at a time. This shift may not be easy, and it probably won't happen overnight, but it will make you more efficient and is the way of the future. Going digital not only helps save paper, but it also saves space and can be more reliable because it's harder to lose digital files than physical files.

Eliminating What You Can

Before I dive into switching things to paper, you first need to go through what you have, which I cover in the following sections. Please do this as a first step because making a switch to digital can be cumbersome and time-consuming. For example, it takes work to scan and then digitally sort documents, so you only want to do this with items that are worth keeping in the first place.

The good news is that amazing things will happen when you declutter your files. You will spend less time looking for what you need, and your train of thought will not be distracted by clutter.

The next few sections go over some ideas to help you eliminate unnecessary items.

Decluttering your files

With files, I want you to be brutal and do a total purge of what you don't need or is outdated.

Decide what to keep and which files to discard. This can be a quick and hassle-free process. I suggest getting three bins and labeling them recycling, important (for your personal documents you need to keep), and filing (this box contains the paper you will turn to digital with upcoming steps).

You'll come across certain documents that have personal information on them that you may need to keep, such as documents with signatures or original copies. It's a good idea to shred these items, or you may choose to keep them in an organized manner. Shredding does require an additional step. If you have a shredder, it's no big deal, but if you don't, then you have to take the documents somewhere, so really assess whether the documents need to be shredded in the first place.

For the other paper that requires filing, here is the fun part: You can file them the old-school way (which I don't recommend), creating folders and keeping them in a filing cabinet or binder, or you can modernize them and make them digital.

Now I have some quick tips to help you decide what to keep and what do get rid of when it comes to paper. These tips are not set in stone but hopefully can get you started on thinking about what to keep:

- **Tax returns and supporting tax documents:** Typically, you should keep your tax documents for about seven years, but there are exceptions, so check the guidelines for your area. There are ways today to digitize your tax documents, and I share more on that in the next section.
- **Owner's manuals:** If the manuals are available online, you don't need to keep them. And I would be shocked if they were not online.
- **Warranties:** Gone are the days when you need to actually keep those warranty cards. Receipts are usually required, but those can also be stored digitally.
- **Receipts:** These can be super tricky because they can fall into so many different categories. I suggest organizing your receipts digitally so you have a defined system for taxes and future returns. (See the later section "Working with Receipts" for more info.)
- **Personal documents:** From birth certificates to land deeds to contracts, there are things we should keep, and they should be filed in a special place. I suggest backing these up digitally if you need to keep the physical copies.

REMEMBER

I don't recommend keeping paper copies of bank statements, credit card statements, utility bills, or similar paperwork because these companies usually have digital copies of these documents that you can access through your online account. If you haven't set up an online account, you can call the company if you need an old statement and see if they can send you a copy via email or traditional mail.

After you've dealt with your paper files, tackle your digital files. Get rid of anything and everything that is a junk document — end of story! Go through your inbox and files twice to really

declutter — we tend to keep many files or emails "just in case" because they don't physically take up space in our home, but they do take up space in our precious online world.

Storing paper records

Keeping records is only worthwhile if you know where to find them. Be conscious of important files and how you store them. If you have hard copies of files and really want to keep the physical copy, I recommend keeping them digitally as well to prevent damage in the event of a flood, fire, or other loss.

When you set up a filing system, organize everything so you can easily find papers and they take up the least amount of space. How you create your folder system depends on your needs.

REMEMBER

Be brutal when deciding what files to keep both digitally and physically. Make sure the files you really need have a dedicated spot so you can find them later. When you're designing your new systems, set yourself up for success by keeping the files you use 80 percent of the time within easy reach and label everything. I also realize you may not be able to declutter your files all at once, and that's okay, but try to tackle as much as possible before getting distracted.

Eliminating Paper and Storing Everything Virtually

With your files ready to go, it's time to get the digital process started. You may wonder why I'm so keen on keeping things digital. I am a major fan because it not only takes up less space, but your documents are also easier to access and share, and they won't fade over time or get damaged. If you have super-important documents that are not stored digitally, they should be stored in a fireproof safe to avoid damage. Do you currently do this? I'd be delighted if you do. So store them digitally and back them up, maybe twice if they are that important.

Scanning your paper files

If you have paper files you want to make digital, there are really only two ways to do this: scanning or taking a photo of them.

Taking a photo may not give you the best readable quality, so scanning may be your best option.

You can get a scanner app on your phone, but if you have more than a few files, this can be cumbersome, and you'll need to use a real scanner.

WARNING

If you have never scanned anything before or have many piles of documents that need to be digitized, I suggest getting help from a friend, co-worker, or professional at a copy store. This will save you not only hours but lots of headaches. You can even bring entire boxes to the copy store, and they can scan them faster than you can scan a few pages. Enlist support with this step if you have lots of paper files and are serious about going digital.

TIP

If you are ready to tackle scanning on your own, here are my top tips:

- **Scan to PDF.** Get in the habit of creating PDFs versus printing whenever possible. But also remember to consider whether you really need to keep the document because your digital files also need to be decluttered.
- **Going forward, scan right away.** This way paper won't pile up, and you won't have to do a massive scan like you are doing right now!
- **Use backup and clouds.** I keep everything in iCloud, but I also back up my entire computer and files quarterly onto an external hard drive for an added measure of security.
- **Organize.** Keep all files organized, make a consistent naming system for your files, and make sure you the most used ones are the most accessible. I start by sorting by year and then making subcategories for my work and personal items.

I don't have a lot of advice on which scanners to use or get. I have one combined with my printer. Whether you need to buy a scanner or use your smartphone is up to you. Keep in mind that many offices and even co-working spots usually have a scanner.

Rethinking printing

After you've spent hours scanning or paid someone to do it for you, you may never look at another paper document! This attitude can help with this next step because this section is about a mindset shift.

Likely you have seen on many emails the words, "Think before you print this email," which makes sense for the environment and for your clutter.

In my first job after university in 2005, my boss would print every email and file it under "customers" or "employees." It was so much that she had to hire an assistant to keep up! Can you imagine if we did that today?

Before you hit that print button, think about whether you really need to have it on paper or whether you can simply save it to PDF.

TIP

If you get the majority of paper from your mail, contact the vendors and switch to paperless communication.

Using clouds, drives, and memory sticks

Now that you have gone through your paper, I want you to decide on a way to digitally store your files. I prefer the cloud as it is the best way to share info, and it doesn't take up space on your hard drive and/or in your office. Plus, you can access the cloud from all your devices.

WARNING

I am not sure when you will be reading this — maybe memory sticks won't even exist anymore, or maybe there will be some new invention to replace the cloud. As I am writing this in 2020, clouds, drives, and memory sticks are the normal ways to store digital documents.

Clouds and internal drives

If you're wondering what cloud storage is, I'm not talking about the fluffy white ones in the sky but the ones that are used to store documents in a remote server–based storage. For example, we used to have to download media, but now we can stream from servers. I use the words "cloud" and "drive" interchangeably because Google Drive is technically a cloud server system. And to get really basic, using the cloud means that you are storing your files on someone else's hard drive rather than your own. The data is usually encrypted for security, and you can access the file through some type of app or software.

The biggest advantage of cloud storage is that you can access your files anywhere on most devices. Plus, you reduce storage on your hard drive. In my experience, I can store everything I need in the cloud, from word documents to PDFs to photos. Plus, my computer doesn't have a USB drive, nor does my cellphone, so sharing documents via the cloud is much more efficient.

The key to making the cloud super efficient is to sync all the data you store. If you don't do this already, I suggest doing some research because your cloud storage needs depend on the devices you use and how much stuff you want to store. Also, the level of security and how tech savvy you are can help you determine which type of cloud storage is best for you.

There are free storage services, but usually when you reach a certain size, a monthly fee kicks in. Still, these fees are worth it because you have to pay for space one way or another for your digital stuff, or buy memory sticks you can easily lose. The best part about cloud storage is that you can easily share large files.

I still get asked what the best cloud-based storage system is, and again I say it depends on your needs and comfort. I use iCloud to sync and store all my files. For my business, I share documents and house them on Google Drive, and many of my customers and employees use Dropbox, so I am familiar with all of these. There are tons of options; the key is to find the one that works best for you.

REMEMBER

Don't be scared by tech words such as "drive" or "servers." After you learn a bit about cloud-based storage, it won't be scary and can be very user-friendly. You may be worried, but you've likely spent time already using cloud systems, as I am sure you have used Dropbox and Google Drive or at least heard of them. I would encourage you to do a bit of research and get familiar with these systems because they are becoming the way most people and businesses are sharing and storing documents. I promise — if I can do it, you can too.

Memory sticks and external hard drives

If I have not convinced you yet about clouds, maybe you want to stick to saving your files to a memory stick. The size depends on how much you have to file and how many large files you have, such as high-resolution photos and videos. You may need to get a large external hard drive for all your storage needs. I recommend one anyway for a second backup of your files as well.

I would recommend getting a 500 gigabyte (GB) memory stick or hard drive to start with because it doesn't cost too much and fits most of your needs. You also need to make sure your computer has the right connection port for the type you get.

TIP

You need to store your files somewhere in addition to your computer, just in case something happens to your computer or the files on your hard drive. Please don't store files only on your laptop, which you could lose or which could break. Today there are lots of options to keep your digital data safe, so I encourage you to do this.

Creating a password system

Security Magazine stated in 2017 that the average business user has 191 passwords! How is anyone supposed to remember that many passwords?

Alternatives are coming, such as fingerprints, biometrics, and facial recognition, but many of those still require passwords for backup and they are not yet 100 percent secure.

It's a good idea to ask yourself if your passwords are secure. I bet some of you still use 123456 and your mother's maiden name or your kids' birthdays as your password. The level of security that your passwords should have is beyond my area of expertise, but you should protect yourself and your data by creating a more complex password to ensure your data's security.

It's important to declutter your passwords, and you have to pick a system to do this. I was totally against password keepers and password managers for a long time. I'm not sure why, but last year I had had enough with passwords, and now I use a manager, which helped me declutter my passwords. Now they are all stored, and even better, they are more secure than before.

Working with Receipts

I felt receipts deserved a bit of discussing because they are annoying, can be tricky to store physically and digitally, and you likely never know what to keep or don't remember where they are if you did keep them. It's not uncommon to be unable to find the one receipt you need. I've been there — it's likely that we all have.

Which receipts to keep

I don't keep the receipts for everyday personal purchases. If you're budget tracking, you may want to keep them to help stay on track. Or you may want to keep a receipt in case you might want to return something (although most stores now have records of purchases). Give yourself a deadline if you think you might return something. I give myself a week to decide whether I want to keep a purchase. Sometimes we forget to return things, which adds to our clutter. Even if the store has a 90-day return policy, make it a point to give yourself that one-week timeline.

I generally keep the receipt for anything valuable or expensive, such as large electronics or jewelry, for insurance purposes.

It's a good idea to keep some receipts for your personal tax return, whether you have a business or not. Different tax laws will dictate what you can add to your personal tax return; for example, healthcare, travel, and anything you had to buy for your job could be deducted. Check with your accountant; they will be able to tell you what you should keep for your personal tax return.

From today onward, start a system. I have a system that categorizes work, personal, and short-term purchases (for anything I might return, which I only keep for one week in my wallet). Under work, I keep all my receipts for business expenses, and under personal, I keep anything of value for insurance purposes.

After you have your system, stick to it. If you want to tackle the receipts before you start this system, carve out 15 minutes a day until you're caught up. If I'm being honest, this will be a painful task and will motivate you to never let receipts pile up again.

TIP

Don't be nervous to get rid of receipts. Usually, you don't need them; and many retailers store them electronically. The most important thing is to set up a system and stick to it going forward. Also, if you find a receipt that doesn't fit into any of your categories, you likely don't need to keep it.

How to store receipts

You can go old-school and create bins and envelopes and continue to have to deal with your receipt clutter for years, or you can simply go digital.

You guessed it: I recommend digital receipt storage. Actually, I say it is a must because these days, if you decide on the old-school method and you need to use or find one of the receipts, I guarantee one of two things: You either won't find it, or when you do, it will be so faded that you won't be able to read it.

Get an app and go digital. Avoid scanning receipts because this can take hours. Instead, use your phone to take a picture from the app for it to automatically upload to software and be stored in the cloud. I use the NEAT app, which then connects to my accounting software. If you use the Google receipt app, you get tons of choices. Once you find an app, the key is to create a system and declutter receipts regularly.

TIP

Get in the habit of taking the photo with the app and then moving the photos on a weekly basis to the folders you created for your system. Be committed to this system and schedule weekly time in your calendar for this step. Then, when you do your annual taxes, you can quickly delete by month, year, and so on, and they will never build up.

Most of the apps keep the receipts in the cloud, so there is no need to keep the physical copy. If you feel safer keeping a copy on your hard drive, that's also an option, but I trust the cloud.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Using the same strategies all over your house
- Incorporating an organizing routine
- Realizing your space doesn't have to be magazine perfect

Chapter 12
Ten Tips for Organizing What's Left

In this book, I focus on decluttering rather than organizing because they are two different topics; however, it's important to mention organizing at least at the end since I am a professional organizer and it's my true passion. I have helped hundreds of individual and corporate clients declutter and get more organized. They go hand in hand, and the first step is removing the clutter and then making an organizing plan that fits your current lifestyle and can be adapted when your lifestyle changes.

It sounds straightforward, but I understand the challenges around organizing and how overwhelming it can be to think about it. The good news is that you can get started just as quickly as you did with decluttering, with ten minutes a day.

These top ten tips are general. If you implement these tips into your daily life, I know you can live a happier and stress-free life.

Put Things in Proper Perspective

The accumulation of clutter can be stressful and cause daily stress and challenges. However, there are many steps you can take to mitigate this issue. First, you have to get rid of the physical and mental

clutter, and then you need to adopt different practices, habits, and mindsets to keep yourself decluttered. It's important to not let the clutter infringe on your clarity and ability to achieve your goals.

REMEMBER

Decluttering only helps if you buy less and focus on constantly being on top of the physical and mental clutter. Just telling you to buy less stuff or to get rid of that T-shirt you've had since fifth grade that you are emotionally attached to won't solve your problems. I can give you advice, but you need to change your perspective. It's like going on a diet. If you only temporarily eat better and cut out bad food, the minute you start bingeing again, the weight will come back.

What possessions are essential, and what adds value to your life? What possessions are in the way of you achieving your real goals and desires?

To organize the items you want to keep, you also need to have a healthy perspective and prioritize items based on your lifestyle. This means getting clear on what your current lifestyle is — not someone else's, and definitely not what you see in magazines.

Understand what is important to you and your family in terms of where your time is spent and where you know you are losing time and efficiency. Then, make it a priority to improve those areas of your space.

Organize for You, Not Instagram

My organizing approach gets down to what is really important in life. Look at your main activities. What do you spend time doing? Adapt your organizing systems and routines to your lifestyle.

I also encourage you to organize because it makes you more efficient. I struggle when people ask me for before-and-after pictures because I find that sometimes the after pictures don't look perfect but are the most efficient organizing solutions.

I disagree with articles and photos that imply everything has to be ultra-organized. When you have a busy life, this may be impossible and cause you more stress. Of course, you may want to have things in nice boxes and match them to your décor, but I encourage you to make it functional first, and then you can focus on the pretty.

Tailor Your Organizing to Your Clutter Personality

In Chapter 1, I talk about your clutter personality. Understanding what your clutter personality is can help you overcome the clutter hurdles associated with it. Remember that it is common to have multiple clutter personalities. The personalities include the following:

- The Emotional Clutterbug
- The "Just-in-Case" Clutterbug
- The "I'm Not a Clutterbug" Clutterbug
- The "I'll Do It Later" Clutterbug
- The "I Can't Decide" Clutterbug
- The "Techie" Clutterbug
- The Knowledge Clutterbug
- The Collector Clutterbug
- The "I Can Use It Someday" Clutterbug

I bring this up again because one or more of these probably describes your organizing personality as well. When you think about organizing, do you get overwhelmed, procrastinate for another day, or feel like you don't know where to start? First, identify what clutter personality you are and then relate this to how you further organize your remaining items. Get real with yourself about why your organizing personality has been stopping you from getting organized and address this issue head on.

TIP

Here are some tips that can apply to any clutterbug:

- **Commit to regularly evaluating your sentimental items.** If you own a box of concert shirts that are tucked away but you never look at them, why keep them? After regularly committing to evaluating your sentimental items, you may be ready to part with them.
- **Repurpose sentimental items.** Your could frame your favorite concert shirts so they can be visible all the time, and discard the rest. This can bring you more joy and reduced clutter!

- **Keep only a small dedicated space for sentimental items.** Have a space in your home that is precious real estate and dedicate this space to your sentimental items. This will help you be more conscious of what resides there.
- **Envision the joy of being able to actually enjoy the true sentimental items you do keep.** Enough said!

Set Aside Time to Declutter AND Organize

Time. Our most valuable asset. I love time and want more of it. You can have more time if you set up organizing systems that fit your current lifestyle.

When you start decluttering, you may need to set a specific time for a few days, weeks, or months to focus on your decluttering goals. Even if it is ten minutes, every day makes a difference.

The same goes for organizing. When your space is ready to be organized, start scheduling time to stay organized. Put in calendar invites at the beginning or end of your days, enlist your family, and commit to making organizing time part of your routine.

Use Boxes, Baskets, and Other Containers

I am advocate of keeping boxes, bins, or cans labeled "Donate," to help encourage daily decluttering. I am also an advocate of keeping labeled bins, baskets, or boxes for the items you do keep to help them stay organized and in good condition.

REMEMBER

Keep your organizing routines and the system of bins you use or adapt when needed, and you will soon find you are organizing automatically. Just like your decluttering mentality, organizing is also a mentality.

Conduct Organizing Challenges

Just as I have suggested decluttering challenges, you can also have organizing challenges.

TIP

Humans are competitive and usually do things more easily if they are a bit fun or if there is a challenge attached to them. Here are a few tips:

- **Make organizing fun.** Use music, friends, champagne, or whatever it takes. Making labels, putting up shelves, and creating organizing spots is always more fun with friends and family. Plus, it will motivate them to get more organized too.
- **Create organizing games.** Create small challenges or judging competitions with your household. For example, do a 30-minute bedroom organizing game and pick a winner based on whose room is the most organized. Or do weekly challenges of who can keep their organized systems the longest. It is surprising how simple tricks can help even the most unorganized household turn competitive around this often-mundane task.
- **Make a 15-day organizing task list.** Each day focus on organizing a different space in your home and stick to the schedule. For example, day 1 organize the junk drawers, day 2 organize your mudroom, day 3 clean out kitchen utensils. The fun is that you can organize different spaces every day, making it more exciting than only organizing your kitchen for days. Switch it up.

Hold Yourself Accountable to Staying Organized

Commitment is key to staying organized and clutter free, as is making sure your friends and family are also aware of your goals and mindset. Here are two tips to help you hold yourself accountable:

- **Find an accountability partner.** Hopefully, those living with you will help and be involved, but also look at how others

can help you achieve your goals. Many people want to get more organized but often don't know where to start and would welcome the support.

- **Plan an event or party to showcase your newly organized space.** It is amazing what happens when the pressure is on! Let friends know you're having a party to showcase your newly organized closet, and see how motivated you become to get it done.

Be Kind to Your Items

After you've finished decluttering everything that doesn't serve a purpose, the least you can do for your remaining items is treat them with the utmost respect. Organize not only for efficiency but also for the value you see in the stuff you keep in your spaces.

Giving your stuff a spot in your precious real estate of your home should be a privilege. Make sure your stuff has the proper shelves, boxes, and protection and display it when possible.

After decluttering, what you keep needs to be front and center in your space because it likely (hopefully) serves an important purpose.

Focus Your Attention on Organizing Traps

The areas I focus on in the following sections are often the most disorganized. Make an effort to keep these spaces organized, and you'll feel better about your home.

Entryways and mudrooms

These areas can be major clutter traps that we always seem to forget about. The entryway is the spot where we enter the house and then typically leave items without giving them a proper home. It's an easy place to also stow-and-go when you're in a hurry and racing to the next appointment. The key to keeping your

entryway and mudrooms clutter free is to ensure that everything and everyone has a designated space. Have a place for each person's essential entryway stuff, such as hooks for backpacks and jackets, dishes for keys, bins for hats, and so on. Determine what is needed and then create specific spots for those items.

Paper

Manage your paper trails because they can often become one of the biggest clutter traps!

If you do not use digital organization and have lots of paper, make sure you have some kind of drawer or basket to put it in. Then when you're ready, deal with it swiftly.

Get rid of flyers and junk mail first and fast. Tear out pieces of things you want to read or catalog items to avoid keeping what you don't need. Bills, time-sensitive things, correspondence, invitations, and so forth should be dealt with and then discarded. Focus on the bills first because you want to maintain good relationships with the folks who send these, and you want your services, such as electricity, to continue.

When you're done sorting and dealing with the important items, you can move on to the catalogs and items you put aside. Keep in mind that the more catalogs you get, the more stuff you want to get. Same goes for certain types of magazines that are known to make us want to consume the newest gadgets and trends. Just be aware of the potential clutter they can tempt you to buy.

Junk drawers

I don't believe in junk drawers. I believe in what I call an "essentials drawer" for the items that you really need. I don't agree with calling it a junk drawer because then you are more likely to fill it with junk. Get rid of your junk drawer once and for all.

Anything that can't close

If your dresser drawer is too full and you can't close it, this is a pretty clear sign that it is a clutter trap and you need to deal with it. If you can't close your desk drawer because it is overflowing, then declutter and reorganize it.

Boxes that aren't see-through

It's important to label any boxes that are not see-through. I love see-through boxes because you can see exactly what is inside them, minimizing the potential for clutter to build up. Labels are the next best thing if you have a bunch of boxes and need to know what is inside.

Anything behind closed doors

Not only is a door you can't close a problem, but anything you keep hidden behind doors that do close properly is probably clutter.

There is also unnecessary memory clutter. I can't stress this enough in this book, but your home is not a museum, and therefore it is not meant to display or house everything that once created a memory for you. I talk a bit about the sentimental saver in Chapter 1 and more on this in Chapter 11. Some people even keep something they don't like or use because someone gave it to them, making them feel guilty to let it go. However, it's useless taking up valuable real estate in your home. And if something really is valuable, then you can donate or sell it and make someone else happy!

Don't Accumulate in the Future

My hope is that after decluttering and reading this book, you will want to be more careful about the clutter that you could be letting back into your life. I love organizing, but I never want to organize anything that should not be in my space in the first place, so I try to stick to these tips that I mention in the very first chapter:

- **Schedule shopping trips.** This helps you avoid overbuying.
- **Know what you have.** Keep some sort of inventory of items that always end up being clutter for you. A list, app, or photos can help with your inventory tracking.
- **Envision the rewards of not only how much time you will save in your space, but also how much better you will feel with the carefully selected items that remain.** A clear space leads to a clear mind!

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About the Author

Jane Stoller is a Swiss-Canadian life-biz organizer, speaker, author, and university instructor whose passion is in decluttering spaces and organizing business processes. Jane wrote her first book, *Organizing for Your Lifestyle,* in 2016 to help friends get more organized. It ultimately gained international attention, and this allowed Jane to turn her passion into a profitable business, Organized Jane. Stoller travels all around the world, working with individuals looking to revamp one space, large corporations needing a complete business overhaul, and entrepreneurs wanting to organize their businesses to gain more time, money, and freedom.

"My goal is not to turn someone's home into a magazine-perfect image; it is not sustainable," says Stoller. "I work around a client's specific lifestyle, or an aspect of their life they want to focus on, and develop a custom organization system from there. The end result? Reduced stress, increased productivity, and happiness."

When Stoller sets down her pen and paper, she puts on her teaching hat. Stoller lectures at Vancouver Island University in Canada for part of the year, helping students learn management skills.

Stoller is passionate about sharing her knowledge through her various social media platforms, books, international speaking events, teaching, and business coaching.

In her spare time, Stoller enjoys spending time with family and staying active via skiing as she currently resides in Whistler, British Columbia, Canada, and has a second home in Exuma, Bahamas.

Publisher's Acknowledgments

Executive Editor: Steven Hayes

Editorial Project Manager: Vicki Adang

Copy Editor: Christine Pingleton

Technical Editor: Riley Webster

Production Editor: Mohammed Zafar Ali

Cover Photos: © Radu Bercan/ Shutterstock

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